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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine student perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. The intent was to inform practice for current and future foreign language teachers. Eight major themes emerged from interviews with numerous advanced level foreign students from throughout central Indiana. These themes include the following: initial language learning, instructional games, classroom atmosphere, class camaraderie, spoken and written language, and assessment and cultural understanding. It was found that students are motivated to learn foreign languages through inclusion in ancillary activities, when provided with activities where interaction with the second language occurs, and are provided with structure, meaningful context, and a comfortable classroom environment. The dissertation includes an overview; a literature review; an explanation of the context, methodology, and modes of analysis of the research; an analysis of the data; a catalogue of instructional techniques that promote language learning; and a summary, discussion, and recommendations. An appendix contains a copy of the permission slip used to obtain the cooperation for the study of minors. (Contains 27 references.) (KFT)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES THAT PROMOTE LANGUAGE LEARNING

A Dissertation

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Media Technology

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Angelia J. Clark-Ridgway

May 2000

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation of Angelia J. Clark-Ridgway, Contribution to the School of Graduate Studies, Indiana State University, Series III, Number 797, under the title *Foreign Language Students' Perceptions of Instructional Techniques that Promote Language Learning* is approved as partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. The intent of this study was to inform practice for current and future foreign language teachers. Constant comparative analysis was selected to collect, codify and analyze the data. Data for this study was supplied through interviews with advanced level foreign language students from throughout central Indiana, citations from expert sources and insights from the researcher's nine years of foreign language teaching experience. Eight major themes emerged: Initial language learning, Instructional games, Classroom atmosphere, Class comradery, Spoken language, Written language, Assessment and Cultural understanding. The outcomes of the study, which are grounded in the eight themes, revealed students' perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. The following practices were perceived by the students to be beneficial in their language learning: Students are Motivated to Learn Foreign Languages Through the Inclusion of a Variety of Ancillary Activities, Students Learn Foreign Languages Best When Provided With Activities Where Interaction With the Second Language Occurs, Students Learned Foreign Languages Best When There Is Structure Provided in Their Learning Experiences, Students Learn Foreign Languages Best When Taught Within a Meaningful Context, Students Learn Foreign Languages Best In Classrooms Where Personal Relationships are Developed and Students Learn Foreign Languages Most Easily In Environments Where They Feel Comfortable.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Any study in the field of foreign language teaching today must take into account the historical context within which today's teachers and students are working. To divorce the actions of teachers and students from their history as participants in second language learning would be to lose significance of their actions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In order to understand today's second language classrooms, one must consider the changes that have recently occurred in the foreign language field. Of most importance is the decade between 1986 and 1996, when three important forces began to change language classrooms from environments of much grammar and translation to places where interaction and communication occur.

Within the last few decades, the first force to shape language learning began when teachers realized that the Audio-Lingual Method (a method focused on learning languages solely through repetition of dialogues and drills) and the Grammar Translation Method (a method focused on teaching languages through extensive analysis of grammar and translation) were failing to develop real communication skills in language learners. This failure caused language specialists to seek more effective ways to teach. Their search led to the development of the communicative approach in Britain in the late 1970s. The communicative approach focused on the active development of competence in understanding the communication of meaning (Oxford, Lavine, & Crookall, 1989).

Whereas the communicative approach led teachers to a new way of teaching foreign languages, agreement over the assessment of communicative competence did not occur until the 1986 publication of the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Proficiency Guidelines (Ervin, 1990). Serving as a second force to

shape language instruction, the 1986 Proficiency Guidelines represented a profession-wide departure from the Audio-Lingual and grammar-oriented instructional approaches of prior decades. Instead, they presented a hierarchy of global descriptors that allowed the teacher to rate student performance or outcomes in the four language areas: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The guidelines offered a new approach to language assessment by providing a tool for determining stages of proficiency and for assessing what a student "could do" (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). The guidelines provided a common yardstick with which to begin the discussion of performance assessment in relation to content standards. The shortcoming of the guidelines, however, was that they separated the four skills of language learning (speaking, listening, reading and writing) from the content to be covered. Therefore, language skills and subject content such as literature, grammar and culture were not fully incorporated for the use of language teachers. The third force to shape instruction came in 1996 with the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century. These standards encompassed both second language content and performance based assessment (Standards, 1996). The new standards encouraged teachers to present language acquisition as an opportunity for their students to broaden their education, to grow in even non-language disciplines and to use their foreign language education as an opportunity to "learn how to learn" (Standards, 1996, p. 50). The acceptance of both the Proficiency Guidelines and the Foreign Language Standards has shaped instruction as well as curricula in second language classrooms. The change from grammar-oriented outcomes to goals that addressed learner outcomes in real life contexts has become a guiding principle for most state and local curriculums (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996).

As most teachers realize the implications of the three forces that have recently shaped language instruction, research is needed to understand foreign language students' perceptions of what instructional techniques prompt them to most easily learn a second language. Foreign language teachers would like to believe that their current methods are

most effective in aiding student learning, but language teachers still do not know which of the multitude of teaching approaches to select and under what circumstances a particular approach might be beneficial (Hosenfeld, 1979). Research, conducted with the goal of understanding which instructional techniques students perceive to be beneficial in learning second languages, could benefit a variety of participants in the language learning field. Because studies related to student perspectives are limited, the notion of a research project intended to better understand learner perceptions was born.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is that there are few documented sources for determining foreign language students' perceptions of which instructional techniques promote language learning. We are now in an era of interactive language teaching, defined by Rivers as "the elicitation of willing student participation and initiative" (p. 10). Yet, as Sizer (1992) reminds us we cannot begin to motivate a student to learn without knowing his or her mind. Seeking possible answers to the question of which instructional techniques today's language students perceive to be the most effective may allow us to improve both instruction and motivation. Glasser (1990) remarked that "while getting to know students, the teacher is continually looking for a better way to teach and asking for their input on what this might be" (p. 53).

Purpose of the Study

The information from this study may provide information useful in improving methodology related to foreign language teaching. Such information will allow teachers to better meet the needs of all language students, and to hopefully understand that certain teaching techniques are most useful to students in specific situations. Knowledge derived from the study will also create theory, which can be used to formulate instructional

techniques for current second language teachers and for university students preparing for a career in foreign language education.

Rationale for the Study

Research on secondary language students' learning experiences may have much to offer teachers attempting to learn more about or improve instructional techniques in foreign languages. The rationale for a study to describe instructional techniques from the learners' perspectives is that such work can enable teachers to better understand the impact of their actions on learners' second language development. "Self-exploration tools such as diaries, discussions, think-aloud interviews and surveys can be entertaining vehicles which provide important insights about language teaching and learning" (Oxford, 1989, p. 454).

Met (1994) remarks that "young people are so far behind their peers in learning foreign languages that the United States cannot even be included in international assessments of foreign language performance" (p. 86). She goes on to say that foreign language programs are not educating enough students to allow the United States to meet the ideals of Goals 2000. According to the Indiana Department of Education, 76,511 students were enrolled in secondary foreign language programs in both public and private schools in the state during the 1998-99 school year. Over 200,000 Indiana secondary students did not study foreign languages. This study may offer some insight into what types of instruction encourage students to best learn a new language. It may meet the need, as described by Stern and Cummins (1981), to know what helps some learners reach a high level and what causes others to fail or become arrested at a low level of language learning.

The perspective of the student in regard to language learning is one that deserves attention. After a review of recent literature, it is known that little research exists that reflects the students' opinions on which specific instructional techniques enable them to

best learn a second language. Galloway and Labarca (1990) comment that throughout time the student as a person has been the most perplexing role for educators to understand. They comment that "it is the perspective we are perhaps least prepared to handle as educators" (p. 112). Teachers do not often ask students to describe their language experiences (Oxford, 1989). If we are to empower students in learning second languages, we need to allow them to share in the process of formulating "best practices" for second language instruction. "Students have the ability to describe what they think and feel about language learning and are eager to share information if we ask" (Oxford, 1989, p. 454).

The communicative classroom calls for the student to be an integral part of instruction and for the classroom to be less teacher-centered. This study will put the learners at the center of understanding better classroom practices, to shed light on their preferences for acquiring a second language. It will allow us to fulfill the new teacher role, one Grittner (1974) defines as a teacher who "experiments with many techniques and obtains feedback from students to find out what works and what does not" (p. 28). Without the student perspective, we cannot be most effective. Oxford (1989) suggests that by having students better understand their own learning we can " learn from our students about their perceptions of instructional effectiveness" (p. 454).

The Setting of the Study

In order to gain the perspective of students studying foreign languages, data for this study were gathered in the natural settings where participating students were learning second languages. Interviews with students were conducted in the schools where they studied foreign languages. Thirteen students were interviewed in four schools within a 70-mile radius of Indiana State University. The schools represented a variety of environments from a private high school in an urban area to a small town school of several hundred students. This variety of settings ensured that student perceptions

represented the experiences of learners from both urban and rural settings, small and large schools and private and public school systems. More detailed descriptions of the schools and their school communities are included in chapter 4.

Limitations

The study will be limited to:

1. The perceptions of purposefully sampled students.
2. The open-ended statements completed by students, given topics which are viewed as important because of background literature or because of emerging theory related to the study.
3. The students whose teacher, parents and building principal have agreed to allow students to participate in the study.

Delimitations

The study will be delimited to:

1. Responses of students enrolled in upper level modern language courses (French, German and Spanish), purposefully selected, from four Indiana high schools.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used in the study:

Foreign language: a language other than the student's native tongue.

Second language: refers to a foreign language within the context of this study.

Communicative classroom: a classroom where communicating in a new language is paramount, where there is willing student participation and initiative (Rivers, 1987).

Instructional Techniques: teaching approaches such as rhythmic songs, hand gestures and mnemonic devices that are utilized in an effort to promote language learning.

Upper level/advanced language students: secondary students (9-12) who are currently participating in their third, fourth or fifth year of language study.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the problem on which this study is focused: to determine foreign language students' perceptions of which instructional techniques promote language learning. It provides the purpose of the study and describes the study's rationale. Chapter 1 also describes the delimitations and limitations of the study and provides an organizational format for the dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents background literature from the areas of communicative language learning, authentic instruction, and learning environments.

Chapter 3 presents the context in which the study was conducted, a description of the qualitative methodology used in the study and a description of the interview protocol that served as a foundation for participant interviews.

Chapter 4 presents a description of the students and the schools that participated in the study and provides analysis of the data. The data analysis presents eight major themes and several sub-categories. These major themes and sub-categories are interrelated and thus, characteristic of qualitative analysis.

Chapter 5 presents outcomes of the study and their applications to incorporating instructional techniques that promote foreign language learning. This chapter also presents possible uses of the outcomes for improving current instructional practice and guiding the preparation of future foreign language teachers.

Chapter 6 presents a summary of the research, discussion, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

A review of background literature for this study, Student Perceptions of Instructional Techniques that Promote Language Learning, points to three important areas of study. These areas of inquiry are Communicative Language Learning, Authentic Instruction, and Learning Environments. At times, interrelated literature from these distinct areas can serve as a foundation for understanding the complexity of instructional techniques that promote second language learning.

Communicative Language Learning

The development of the communicative approach to language learning in Britain in the late 1970's spawned a revolution in language teaching that continued to influence instruction in the United States through the 1990's. This revolution resulted in the more widespread acceptance and implementation of the communicative approach to teaching and learning foreign languages. This approach focused on the active development of competence in understanding and communicating meaning (Oxford, Lavine, and Crookall, 1989).

As Phillips (1994) suggested, "Professional challenges have confronted us for a number of years as we struggle with a paradigm shift that has challenged us to revise our goals and objectives of language study" (p. 1). In order to understand the aforementioned objectives of language study, one must be appraised of the characteristics of

communicative language learning. One means of understanding communicative language learning is to refer to the Standards In Foreign Language Learning (1996) which suggest that communication is best understood by the inclusion of three "communicative modes" (p. 32). These modes are the Interpersonal Mode, the Interpretive Mode and the Presentational Mode.

The Interpersonal Mode places importance on "active negotiation of meaning among individuals" (Standards, 1996, p. 32). This feature of communicative language learning is one where participants can observe, monitor and interact together in an effort to use their language skills to negotiate the meaning of their expressions. Through this process of linguistic back-and-forth, also called negotiation, communication can be achieved. Although this mode is most obvious because of the give and take that can be visually observed in oral communication, "both the interpersonal and negotiated dimensions can be realized through reading and writing" (Standards, 1996, p. 32).

The Interpretive Mode focuses on the "appropriate cultural interpretation of meanings that occur in written and spoken form" (Standards, 1996, p. 32). Because the interpretive mode focuses on interpretation, the give and take between those communicating is not a factor in this facet of communication. Its distinction from the other modes is that, as its name suggests, it does not allow "for active negotiation between the reader and writer" (Standards, 1996, p. 32). Put another way, interpreting another's message differs from comprehending it; interpretation includes the ability to not only understand the language expressed, but to understand it within the cultural context from which it was communicated.

Lastly, the Presentational Mode, refers to the "creation of messages in a manner that facilitates interpretation by members of other cultures" (Standards, 1996, p. 32). Examples include the writing of reports, essays and the presentation of speeches. This mode does not allow for active negotiation among participants, but can be described as a "one-way" communication of writing or speaking.

Another means of understanding communicative language learning is to understand how this philosophy of language learning is practiced in actual classrooms. Phillips (1994) spoke of the need for foreign language teachers to employ instructional techniques that encourage learners, at developmentally appropriate levels, to interact with the foreign languages they are studying. She elaborated by saying, "Broader purposes for language study and a growing research base in second language acquisition have led to instructional approaches that emphasize the developmental aspect of language learning rather than a mastery model; envisioning the student as an interactive learner..."(p. 1).

Savignon (1983) also described facets of the communicative classroom. She challenged the concept of communicative activities being "add-ons" to the standard, grammar-based curriculum. She suggested that "The development of the learner's communicative abilities is seen to depend not so much on the time they spend rehearsing grammatical patterns as on the opportunities they are given to interpret, to express, and to negotiate meaning in real-life situations" (p. vi).

Rivers (1987) provided a more detailed description of the how an interactive classroom should look. She summarized the key features of classrooms where interactive learning occurs. A classroom where there is much listening to authentic materials; A classroom where students, from the beginning, listen and speak in reaction to pictures and

objects; A classroom where students are involved in joint tasks, purposeful activity; A classroom where students watch videotapes of native speakers interacting; A classroom where pronunciation is improved interactively; A classroom where cross-cultural interaction is important; A classroom where there is interaction of reader and text; A classroom where when something is written, it is read by somebody; A classroom where learning grammar is developing rules from living language material; A classroom where testing should be interactive and proficiency-oriented; A classroom where the community that speaks the language is included in instruction.

Authentic Instruction

The types of interactive, communicative activities that are featured in today's foreign language classrooms are closely related to the concepts of authentic instruction. According to Newmann, Secada and Wehlage (1995) there are three characteristics that define authentic instruction a) Construction of knowledge, b) Disciplined inquiry, and c) Value beyond school.

Construction of knowledge refers to the ability of students to assimilate new knowledge based on understanding prior knowledge (Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage, 1995). The new knowledge gained should not be mere repetition of new information, but rather, the process of interpreting, evaluating and analyzing information such that it leads to authentic accomplishment. As recommended by Lee and VanPatten (1995), the foreign language teacher should be responsible for providing students with ample opportunities for communication, that is, "using the new language to interpret and express real life messages" (p. 8).

A second characteristic of authentic instruction is disciplined inquiry. The concept of disciplined inquiry refers to the cognitive process of engaging in in-depth understanding, not just superficial recognition (Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage, 1995). Foreign language students should learn languages by being given opportunities to utilize their new language skills in creating dialogues, correspondence with pen pals and topical debates. Galloway and Labarca (1990) commented that "real learning requires interaction between the learner and his or her environment" (p. 149). They suggest that language learners be given ample opportunities to negotiate meaning, exchange unpredictable information and respond via their newly learned second languages (Galloway and Labarca, 1990).

Value beyond school refers to an achievement having value apart from the role of assessing the competence of a learner (Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage, 1995). Foreign language students should be able to see the value of their language learning activities outside of the normal classroom. Tasks need to be authentic. Foreign language students need to experience questions, which do not have yes and no answers, and scenarios where negotiation with another participant is needed in order to reach understanding. Galloway and Labarca (1990) wrote, "Experiences that students are asked to undergo must be interesting, meaningful and real, just as they are in the many worlds outside the learner's classroom" (p. 139).

Omaggio-Hadley (1993) wrote on the development of a classroom with an orientation toward proficiency. She suggested that within such environments, opportunities must be provided for students to practice using the foreign language in a variety of contexts that are likely to be found in the target cultures. She recommended

the inclusion of four corollaries in the attainment of this goal: Students should be encouraged to express meaning as soon as productive skills are introduced, Opportunities should be provided for active communication among students, Creative language practice must be encouraged among students and Authentic language should be employed in instruction (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). Standards In Foreign Language Learning (1996) also supported the concept of opportunity to engage in authentic discourse in the second language classroom. The Standards discussed the facets of a language classroom where authentic communication is paramount when they suggested,... "Learners must have ample opportunities to experience the second language as it is spoken and written in target cultures" (p. 35). Authentic contexts were also suggested, "Meaningful language from real contexts becomes the basis for subsequent development of expressive skills" (p. 35).

Wiggins (1998) reiterated the need to have students engaged in authentic tasks in their learning scenarios. By making authenticity paramount in instruction, learners are supplied with greater incentives and insights into the specific reasons behind their lessons. Moreover, authentic tasks allow students to test their new knowledge in "real world situations" (Wiggins, 1998, p. 22). Instead of repeating pre-fabricated dialogues, Wiggins (1998) would suggest that teachers encourage students to use their new language skills to "wisely and effectively solve unstructured problems" (p. 22). In essence, he suggested we ask students, "to do" foreign languages (Wiggins, 1998). The Standards For Foreign Language Learning (1996) reinforced Wiggins' charge that students learn by being actively engaged when they suggested, "Active use of language is central to the

learning process....They [students] learn by doing, by trying out new language, and by modifying it to serve communication needs" (p. 37).

Learning Environments

The creation of a comfortable learning environment can contribute to the effectiveness of instructional techniques in foreign language classrooms. Omaggio-Hadley (1993) stated that she favors a language methodology that addresses the effective needs of the learners by providing a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere. Other works of literature mentioned a supportive learning environment as an essential component in optimal educational settings. Learning should take place in an attractive physical space, in an atmosphere where support and respect are given to all learners and where mistakes are analyzed constructively (Glickman, 1993). Wong (1991) noted that for all students to be actively engaged in learning activities, the classroom environment must be one that is conducive to learning, one that has a positive climate.

Included in the development of a positive classroom environment, is the notion that educators should work to create "a community of learners" (Fullan, 1993, p. 45). Fullan (1993) elaborated by commenting that the development of a community of learners, intent on solving problems through collaboration, is a central tenant to school as a learning organization. Sizer (1992) also described the school as a community. He noted that schools are "thoughtful places." "The people in them are known. The units are small enough to be coherent communities of friends," he summarized (Sizer 1992, p. 128). In terms of communication, Savignon (1983) commented that "Communicative language teaching requires a sense of community" (p. 122). She adds that teachers need to work to

create an environment of trust where "learners may interact without fear of failure" (p. 122).

Relationships between learners and teachers are another important aspect of promoting instructional techniques in second language classrooms. Because adolescent language learners are often asked to create strange utterances and make public presentations in new languages, having a personal connection with their language teachers can be an important backdrop in the delivery of instruction. As described by Glasser (1993), "the better we know someone and the more we like about what we know, the harder we will work for that person" (p. 30). Personal relationships in an instructional setting may not only prompt students to work harder, but may also result in improved achievement. McLaughlin (1993) has found that, how personal the secondary school environment is contributes more than any other single factor to encouraging students' engagement and willingness to work on academic goals. When teachers connect to students and understand their families and cultures, students achieve at higher levels. (McLaughlin, 1993). Glasser (1990) described good teachers and their connections to students. He noted that good teachers are "teachers who relate to them [the students] on their level; the teacher does not place herself above them [the students] and they are comfortable talking to her" (p. 66). Effective teachers promote learning because, according to Wong (1991), they realize that they cannot help a student learn unless that student knows that the teacher cares about him or her.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of background literature related to this study of instructional techniques that promote language learning. Three categories were presented from areas related to language learning: Communicative Language Learning, Authentic Instruction, and Learning Environments. This survey of literature has formulated several key points. The philosophy of language teaching and learning has evolved in recent decades into a focus on interactive, communicative environments. Authentic tasks offered within meaningful context afford language students the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and use newfound knowledge to negotiate meaning with their peers in second language classrooms. Foreign language students prosper in environments where they feel support from their peers and a personal connection to their teachers. Chapter 3 will discuss the context, methodology and modes of analysis for this study.

Chapter 3

CONTEXT, METHODOLOGY, AND MODES OF ANALYSIS

Context for the Study

Advanced foreign language students from four high schools in central Indiana were participants in this study. Three of the four schools were public schools and one school was a religiously affiliated private school. All schools included in the study offered foreign language coursework through at least the fourth year of language study. One school featured a grade 10 through 12 configuration, the other participating schools housed grade levels 9 through 12. Initially, building administrators were contacted to request involvement in the study and to seek recommendations for advanced-level language teachers who might be willing to assist with student referrals and data collection. All schools contacted agreed to participate in the study. Teachers were asked to provide the most varied sample available from their students who were enrolled in advanced language classes. The researcher discussed the need to have a fair representation among students from varied socio-economic, racial, academic and language backgrounds. Once given a pool of possible participants, each student was provided with an informational letter and permission slip (See Appendix A) to be taken home and signed by a parent or guardian before any interviewing could begin. From the four schools, thirteen students participated in the interview process. They represented three different racial backgrounds, a variety of socio-economic and academic backgrounds and the experience of having studied French, German or Spanish at an advanced level. Most of the students had experienced the instructional methods of at least three different language teachers. Five of the students had studied more than one foreign language.

Ultimately, the data from six participants were used to reach informational redundancy. The researcher worked to maintained a diverse sample even as analysis led to informational redundancy (no new information was learned). Finally, the data employed to reach redundancy represented the voices of both male and female students from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds, from academically weak and strong participants and from three diverse ethnic backgrounds. For the purpose of this study, the names of persons, places and schools have been changed. Context is provided in an effort to give each participant his or her own identity yet, pseudonyms are used throughout the study in order to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

Qualitative Methodology and Analysis

The qualitative paradigm was selected for the study for a variety of reasons. First, gathering data in a natural setting, with real participants as the direct source of data is a key indicator of a qualitative paradigm. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) comment that "Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context. They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs" (p. 30). Thus, the researcher interviewed students in the schools where they were learning new languages. Data were therefore gathered in order to learn which specific techniques foreign language students perceived to be effective given circumstances under which they were introduced. Second, qualitative research is descriptive in nature (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). In this study, data was not reduced to numbers, but analyzed such that the richness of a description could lend truth to understanding which instructional techniques were perceived to be beneficial within a particular setting. A thick description of the context was provided so that readers could

best understand the settings where language instruction occurred. Third, a qualitative approach was chosen for the study because qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simple outcomes (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). It was important to come to an understanding of not only which instructional techniques are perceived to be effective to students of second languages, but also to understand exactly how participating students perceived instructional methods were introduced and utilized in their classrooms. Fourth, a qualitative approach was selected for the study because such data was not analyzed deductively, but theory emerged as if "constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 32). Thus, in the study, a qualitative paradigm allowed the researcher to conduct interviews and analyze data with the thought that such analysis might lead to further questions for the participants. Having the ability to conduct subsequent interviews as the study progressed allowed the researcher to link the varied perceptions about language instruction into a more complete picture regarding second language instruction. Lastly, because it was hoped to better understand the meaning foreign language students create from their experiences with language learning techniques; a qualitative approach was appropriate for the study. The researcher, through the study, wanted to better understand the dynamics involved in language learning, especially from the students' perspective. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) wrote, "meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach" (p. 32).

Ultimately, once the data had been gathered, constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to analyze the data. Initially, the coding and analysis of the data was intended to be accomplished through the assistance of a computer program, The Ethnograph (1998). Unfortunately, this program did not

accomplish the researcher's needs to be more intimately connected with the data. In order to tactually manipulate the data, an alternative coding system was developed. Raw data were color-coded from student transcripts and transferred to large, color-coded posterboards from which emergent themes could be derived. An audit trail, as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), was kept to record data analysis procedures and was filled with journal entries documenting the steps of the research process. This journal included thoughts and actions of the researcher as each portion of the study unfolded.

Purposeful Sampling

The method of sampling in the study was purposeful, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Students were initially chosen for interviews and ultimately for data analysis for specific reasons as defined by subsequent biographies. Such sampling is different from the conventional random sampling of many quantitative studies. Sampling in the study was purposeful, based on informational, not statistical considerations. Sampling was conducted to maximize information; such as to speak with students from varied school settings, socio-economic, ethnic and academic backgrounds. Sampling occurred throughout the study until there was "informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 202). Sampling in the study transpired until outcomes were repeated and confirmed by one additional session of data gathering. Thus, the researcher proceeded with the interview and data analysis processes until theories began to emerge and were confirmed by at least one additional interview. Ultimately, the transcribed interviews of six participants were needed to reach informational redundancy.

Selection of Participants

This study utilized students' subjective observations of their own learning experiences. The primary source of data for the study was interviews conducted by the researcher in the schools where the students studied second languages. Initially, thirteen students were interviewed within four schools in central Indiana. The researcher worked closely with classroom teachers and administrators to identify students of diverse backgrounds (socio-economic, learning disabled, ethnic etc.) Because it was important for the researcher to gain the perspective of students who had some experience in language learning, the students chosen came from third, fourth and fifth level language classes. Some of the students had studied only one foreign language; most had studied two or more second languages.

Data Collection and Sources

Interviews, informal observations, open-ended questions and literature of professionals in foreign language education served as the data source in this study. Prior to any data collection, foreign language literature, observations and the researcher's own experiences were reviewed in an effort to formulate focusing questions for the study. The development of the focusing questions, its subsequent interview protocol and the interview process will be detailed in later sections.

Focusing Questions

Determining focus for a study can be done through the use of focusing questions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) no study can be " conducted in the absence of focus" (p. 226). Focusing questions are general in nature and important "because they

give focus to data collection and help organize it..." (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 155). The focusing questions for this study were open-ended and concerned with meaning and process rather than cause and effect. The content of such questions came from a review of recent literature, most especially Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996), and the researcher's own nine years of teaching experience. They served as a guide for the subsequent development of the interview protocol. The following were focusing questions identified for this study.

1. What are students' reactions to the initial introduction of the second language?

2. What are students' perceptions of the teacher-induced climate, culture and community in the foreign language classroom?

3. What are students' perceptions of techniques that were used to develop class camaraderie?

4. What specific instructional techniques do students perceive to be helpful in their understanding of both spoken and written material in the target language?

5. What specific techniques encouraged students to speak the new language?

6. What techniques did students perceive to be meaningful in regard to assessment?

7. What specific techniques were used that enabled students to better understand the cultures being studied?

8. What techniques were used that allowed students to make connections between foreign language study and the study of other disciplines?

Interviews

Cooperating language teachers provided a pool of willing student participants before the interview process could begin. Students and their parents were then sent an informational letter and permission slip that was returned to the cooperating teachers before the interviews began. The researcher obtained a signed permission slip from every student before the interviews began. Initially thirteen students from four, central Indiana schools were interviewed during the spring semester of 1999. The student interviews were conducted in a one-to-one format, with two tape recorders present. The researcher worked to ensure the least disruption of students' academic schedules and promised parents that interview sessions would be limited to no more than forty minutes in length. The researcher explained to participating students that she would also be taking written notes during the interview. The interviews began with a brief introduction from the researcher about her language teaching background and an explanation of the study. Respondents were also assured of the anonymity of their responses, teachers' names and their schools. Verbatim transcriptions of the taped interviews were then made and analyzed using the constant comparative method.

Individual teachers were provided with a copy of the interview protocol before interviews began. This allowed cooperating teachers, if necessary, to have interview questions available if participating students or their parents brought concerns forward.

Interview Protocol

The focusing questions and subsequent interview protocol were open-ended and concerned with understanding student perceptions of instructional techniques rather than cause and effect. Both sets of questions helped to provide boundaries as the research

design developed. Employing the aforementioned focusing questions as a foundation, the following interview protocol was developed and comprised the core questions asked of research participants. These questions were organized by themes in an effort to promote discussion of the varied aspects of second language instruction. When necessary, the researcher asked additional follow-up questions that were appropriate for the responses provided by participants.

Initial language learning. What activities did your first year teacher use that motivated you to learn a new language? Why did you first decide to take a foreign language? Did this teacher's activities seem to match your goals for language learning?

Classroom atmosphere. Describe the things your teachers have done to create an environment that made language learning easier. Please consider room arrangement, visuals, noise level, etc. What kinds of auditory prompts have your teachers used? Are you able to apply these limericks to grammar concepts? How? Describe the noise level in the classroom where you most easily learned a new language.

Class comrarderie. Have your language teachers done certain activities to help you and your classmates feel more comfortable when learning a new language? If not, what types of things could your teachers have done to make you feel more comfortable? Describe the room arrangements(s) in the room where you were most comfortable in learning a new language. Or, how would a room be arranged so that students would be most comfortable in learning a new language? Describe the relationship you and your classmates shared in a successful language learning experience. Describe the relationship between your classmates and your teacher in what you considered to be a class that enabled you to easily learn a new language. Has group work been encouraged in your

second language classrooms? If so, how do you feel about your own learning when group work is used? If group work has been helpful in your language class, did your teacher take certain steps to establish the group work?

Spoken language. What specific actions have your language teachers taken to help you learn to speak a new language? Describe any helpful use of facial expressions and gestures. How does oral translation help or hinder your learning to speak another language? Have drawings on the overhead projector or chalkboard affected your language learning? How have they affected your language learning? What have you found to be the easiest way to learn classroom routines in the new language? How do you feel when grammar points are first introduced in the new language? How do you best learn new grammar, in the new language or in English? Do you feel you learn more of the new language by having its grammar explained in the new language? Why? Why not? What type of spoken model do you consider to be the most helpful in learning a new language? Has your opinion in this regard changed as your language study has progressed? What actions have your teachers taken to prompt students to speak the new language? Are there particular activities that prompt a student to speak the new language? How are students encouraged to speak a new language? Do your teachers give you incentives? Which incentives are helpful?

Written language. What actions have your teachers taken to help you better understand written forms of your second language? Have your teachers used strategies like outlines and vocabulary lists before or during your reading a work of literature? How have these activities been helpful? What activities have your teachers used that have enabled you to transfer your understanding of grammar into situations where the new

language is spoken? When learning grammar, do you learn new things best when you first have practical uses of the concepts and then learn the grammar rule(s) or do you remember best when first given grammar rules and then practical examples?

Assessment. What techniques have been used in your language class that have been helpful in assessing your progress? Do you benefit most from written or oral tests? Why? Why not? Are informal assessments (such as thumbs up etc.) helpful to language students? Why? Why not?

Cultural understanding. What activities have your teachers used that have helped you to understand the culture(s) of the language you are studying? Are there activities that help you take the perspective of the native speakers of your language?

Connections. What actions have your language teachers taken that have allowed you to connect language study with the study of other subjects? Were there specific techniques that the teacher used that enabled you to better understand your first (native) language?

Interviewing In Qualitative Research

Interviewing, according to Seidman (1998), provides access to the context of people's behavior, a means for understanding their behavior. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand students' perceptions of instructional techniques in the second language classroom. Seidman (1998) suggests that if the researcher's goal is to understand the meaning that people involved in education make of their experiences, then interviewing provides a necessary avenue of inquiry. In addition to the interview protocol, students were also asked to complete short, open-ended statements at the close

of the interview detailing their perceptions of any instructional techniques that were not included in the interview protocol.

Constant Comparative Analysis

During the data collection process, the data were transcribed verbatim from the audio tape recordings and written notes. Constant comparative analysis as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was used to collect, codify and analyze data. The constant comparative method, originally described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), can be divided into a several step process.

First, data from individual student interviews were color coded into categories based on a "feels right" basis as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Eight distinctly different color-coded categories emerged from initial analysis of student responses. The process of coding the material provided the researcher with a tool to concentrate large quantities of written material into categories. Miles and Huberman (1984) state "Codes are categories. They usually derive from research questions, hypotheses, key concepts, or important themes. They are retrieval and organizing devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments relating to particular questions, concepts or themes. Clustering sets the stage for analysis." (p. 56)

Like responses were coded together. Then, original categories were further analyzed and delimited and further sub-themes within the original categories began to emerge. Lincoln and Guba (1985) comment that in this step, theory begins to develop and is delimited because of improved articulation and integration. Finally, in the last step, data analysis was complete and theory could be written. In this process, carefully

refined categories were created which are grounded in data and have been induced from the process of constant comparison.

The data in this study were well suited for constant comparative analysis. The data collection process combined the benefits of questions based on published writings in the field of foreign language teaching coupled with open-ended segments that were guided by participating students themselves. First, possible initial categories were developed from a myriad of literature reviewed from the field of second language learning. Then, students were prompted to consider their perspectives related to language learning across the axioms that sprung from expert writings. Finally, they were asked to complete open-ended statements regarding their perceptions of effective instructional techniques in second language learning. Interview data provided the researcher with a broad description of how specific instructional techniques were perceived. This perception went beyond the writings of language theorists themselves, as it delved into the ideas of second language learners in authentic learning environments. The comparison between theory that had been published on second language learning and the perceptions of advanced language students at times reinforced the data, and at some points was a cause for clarification with interviewees. This reiterative analysis is characteristic of the qualitative methods described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Rigor and Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is based upon four criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Particular techniques were included in the study to ensure that it resulted in

credible findings and interpretations. First, triangulation was planned for in an effort to ensure credibility in the study. Triangulation involves the use of varied sources, methods, researchers or theories. Triangulation in the study was achieved by data collection from student interviews, open-ended statements, experts writing on instruction in foreign language and the researcher's own background in foreign language instruction. Also used to ensure credibility was a process called member checking, where the researcher shared segments of the research with stakeholders. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "The member check, whereby data, analytical categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data was originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). The member check is an important part of a qualitative study as it allowed the researcher to share with participants in an effort to best understand the reality of those involved in the study. This process allowed the researcher the opportunity to corroborate interpretations with participants in the study.

Transferability in the study was accomplished through the thick description that accompanied emergent theory. A 'thick description" of the context of this study is provided for previously in this chapter and in Chapter 1. Detailed descriptions of the participating students and schools are included in Chapter 4. Although the qualitative paradigm does not specify the external validity of a study, it provides details of a particular context sufficient enough to allow others to "reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln and Guba, p. 316).

The dependability of the study refers to the rectitude of the process of the research and the confirmability signifies the integrity of the theories that emerged from this study.

An audit trail is normally used to provide for these two aspects of trustworthiness in the study. An audit trail includes the raw data, data reduction and analysis, data reconstruction and notes. The audit trail was provided for in this study in the form of color-coded data, corresponding data-filled posterboards and a research journal. The journal entries described the thoughts, decisions and outcomes of each stage of this study. It also detailed the multi-step process of data analysis and reconstruction.

The Process of Analysis

Student interview tapes were taken to a typist and were transcribed verbatim as the interview process proceeded. Therefore, the researcher could modify questions and seek clarifications with participants as circumstances dictated. The data were printed from Microsoft Word (1997) and the smallest meaningful segments were color-coded according to initial categories. These color-coded segments were cut into distinct segments. Initial codes were recorded on corresponding posterboards where the data was preliminarily attached using removable tape. Within each color-coded board, data was further analyzed to seek emergent themes, sub-themes and integrated categories. The emergence of new themes slowed as data from the fifth participant was coded. Coding the interview data from the sixth student confirmed that informational redundancy had been achieved. After the data was initially coded, some color-coded segments were moved and/or shared between boards as necessitated by their inherent meaning. This process was done repeatedly until the eight major themes and their interrelated sub-themes eventually emerged. The development of themes, their rules of fit and subsequent

decisions related to sub-themes is documented within the color-coded posterboards and research journal.

Summary

This chapter has provided the context under which data related to student perceptions of instructional techniques was gathered. It also relayed information about the focusing questions that served as a springboard for the formal interview protocol. Lastly, the chapter details the analysis methods from which themes regarding perceptions of instruction emerged. Chapter 4 will further describe the participants in the study and relate the data that were gathered through conversations with language learners.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present an analysis of the data gathered in interviews with advanced-level foreign language students from schools in central Indiana. The backgrounds of the language learners are also presented in an effort to provide the reader with context for the comments given and the possibility of transferability to other settings. The interviews were conducted on an individual basis in schools where students were studying advanced-level second languages. All interviews were conducted during the spring of 1999 and later transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Eight major themes emerged from the analysis of the data. Each theme features several sub-themes that are presented and supported through direct quotations from student participants. The use of direct quotation allows the reader to best understand the perceptions students were conveying in regard to instructional techniques in teaching foreign languages.

Description of the Schools

School A: School A can be characterized as a private high school in an urban area. At the time of the study, it had a population of nearly 800 students, 15% of whom were from minority backgrounds. The faculty worked closely with parents to promote a

collegiate-like environment. In school A, the completion of a two-year study of a modern language was a requirement for graduation. The school offered three modern languages, from level one to level six and over 98% of former graduates had gone to college.

School B: School B was a comprehensive, public high school that was described by the Indiana Department of Education as an "urban fringe school." It had a population of nearly 2,500 students who were from both urban and suburban homes. These pupils well represented six different ethnic backgrounds. The school had a large foreign language department where students could study up to four years of four different languages. Approximately 60% of graduating seniors from school B had continued their education at the college level.

School C: School C was a rural high school with 1,100 students in attendance. The parents from this rural community were very involved in both the curricular and extra-curricular activities that were offered by the school. The student population was nearly 99% white and 55% of the graduates had gone on to college. Students in school C had the opportunity to pursue their interest in foreign languages through the three different languages that were offered. Advanced levels of all languages were available.

School D: The Indiana Department of Education described School D as a "small town" school. Of the just over 600 students, 99% were white and nearly 50% of its graduates continued to study at the college level. Students enrolled in classes at school D had the opportunity to study two modern languages. These courses ranged from beginning to advanced levels. Students, teachers and administrators had worked to create a small-town atmosphere that supported and permeated the learning environment in this school.

Background of Language Learners

Dori. Dori was a junior studying Spanish I and French IV in school A when she participated in the study. Dori was chosen for the study because of her broad experiences as a second language student. She had been a French student since her elementary school years and added Spanish during her last years of high school. She was an above average student who was very involved in athletics and community service projects through her school. She is an African-American student who comes from a socio-economically-advantaged family. Dori provided rich description related to specific actions her several language teachers had taken to enable her to most easily learn to speak new languages. She said "We [the students] can translate words ourselves, I would like them [the teachers] to say "okay this is how you use the word or this is the context in which the word goes."

Ed. Ed was a senior in Spanish IV at school B when interviews were conducted. Ed was raised in a bi-lingual environment where Spanish was the first language he heard and spoke. Although Ed had not lived outside the United States, he had lived in a large, urban area, which had a large Spanish-speaking population. His parents were both born in Spanish-speaking countries. Ed first learned Spanish as a spoken language only and returned to study the language from the grammatical and structural side. He was a good second language student, but occasionally missed assignments due to the amount of time he dedicated to his part-time employment. Ed offered a unique perspective to the study; he provided some insight into learning second language grammar as a near-native speaker of that language and also succinctly described the importance of developing class camaraderie in foreign language courses. When asked about the relationship he and his

classmates shared in a successful language learning experience he said, " I knew some of the people in my classes and I didn't know others. And the ones I didn't know, I got to know better. It [the relationship] just kind of helped us because we were friends so we trusted each other with the language and tried to help each other out." Ed graduated and now studies at a public university in central Indiana.

Jon. Jon was included in the study because of the depth of his description regarding second language learning. He was a senior enrolled in Spanish IV at school B during the time of the study. Jon was a high achieving student who worked very hard in both the classroom and athletic field. He had studied with four different Spanish teachers and has continued his studies at a private college in central Indiana. Jon is from a white, upper- middle class family. He was very adept at describing the environments in language rooms where he most easily learned a new language. He commented "...they [the teachers] always had music playing so that the atmosphere wasn't as tense. That would make you feel more free to be open and talk."

Mia. Mia was included in the study because she was studying two foreign languages during her senior year at small town school D. Mia was a very talented, self-motivated student who lacked parental support for her academic endeavors. She was working part-time and aspired to attend a public university in central Indiana. Mia had studied with two different language teachers who developed a great deal of respect for her work ethic. Mia offered insight into her perceived benefits of the group work activities that her teachers had organized. She said when she was in a group, "I'm learning what everybody else knows."

Nan. Nan, a junior in school A, was included in the study for several reasons. Nan was enrolled in both French III and Spanish II at the time of the data collection. She had also studied a foreign language while living abroad with her family. Nan was a strong student from a middle-class background who devoted much time to her studies and athletic activities. Her extensive second language experiences had given her a great deal of knowledge related to language learning. Nan's family is African-American and supports her language interests by themselves offering insights into the process of learning second languages. Her descriptions, especially those related to initial language experiences and group work, were profound. Nan commented that in one favorite beginning experience, "She [the teacher] made things easy and it just kind of stuck with us because she wasn't forcing verbs down our throats or anything. In the beginning it was English. After a while it was Spanish."

Tim. Tim was a senior who was studying French, German and Spanish at the time of the data collection. Tim was a middle-class, white student who excelled in languages at rural school C. He was included in the study for his depth of language experiences and because he had, in some fashion, pursued language study since his elementary school years. In addition to being a member of several extra-curricular organizations, Tim devoted free time to serving as a tutor for foreign language students. Tim graduated near the top of his class and planned to continue his language study at a public university in central Indiana. Being provided with opportunities to communicate in the new languages was important to Tim. He remarked, " It's easier to communicate in a small group and that's important to students. When I explain something to a peer, it solidifies my understanding."

Analysis of the Eight Themes Which Emerged From the Data

Focusing questions, based on literature related to foreign language learning, were used to create the formal interview protocol. Initially, the researcher planned to center interview questions and initial data analysis around the eight dominating themes of the protocol: Initial language learning; Classroom atmosphere; Class camaraderie; Spoken language; Written language; Assessment; Cultural understanding; Connections.

Because a qualitative paradigm had been selected for the study, interviews were conducted and data were analyzed with the thought that analysis might lead to new and different questions. Having the ability to conduct subsequent interviews and to elicit more detail regarding certain themes, allowed the researcher to link varied perceptions about language learning into a more complete picture regarding foreign language instruction. This process allowed the students to relate, early in the data collection process, that the inclusion of a theme relating to connections between second language learning and other subjects had not been significant in their learning. Instead, their responses reflected the notion that instructional games were perceived to be more notable in their language learning experiences. Ultimately, the researcher began to include questions and data analysis related to instructional games and this theme emerged as a dominant area in the research study.

Finally, eight themes and their related sub-themes emerged in the analysis of the data. These themes are: Initial language learning, Instructional games, Classroom atmosphere, Class camaraderie, Spoken language, Written language, Assessment and Cultural understanding. The eight themes also contain sub-categories that not only support their own encompassing theme, but could also stand alone. This inter-relatedness

of the themes and sub-categories is a main component of inductive analysis. Such a process is, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), more likely to identify the mutually shaping influences that interact within particular phenomena.

Initial Language Learning

Because the initial years of language learning are significant not only in terms of a foundation in a new language, but also in terms of student retention, questions were posed to participants regarding this initial time in their language study. Students were asked to comment specifically on the techniques and motivations that surrounded their first year of language study. Within the major theme of Initial language learning, three sub-categories emerged: Students were motivated by their teachers' use of ancillary (outside of the textbook) activities, Students began foreign language study because it was a requirement, and Beginning- level teachers match student goals. Students expressed their perceptions of particular techniques that were utilized in their first foreign language classes. The three associated sub-categories are described and supported below.

Students were motivated by their teachers' use of ancillary activities. One of the preliminary questions asked in this study was," What activities did your first year language teacher use that motivated you to learn a new language?" Data collected throughout the interviews points to the beginning-level teachers' inclusion of ancillary materials in first introducing the second language. Students commented that they were motivated by their teachers' use of games, songs, and other ancillary materials. Jon commented that "We seemed to play a lot of games. That made class more fun. They [the games] helped us learn more easily – that wasn't as important in third and fourth year." Nan went on to say that interactive activities such as singing were important. She

said, "My teacher used mostly singing. We were learning but we didn't know we were. She really wanted to interact with us."

Students also relayed negative experiences that supported the notion of the inclusion of ancillary materials in the initial days of language learning. Nan, who had studied two foreign languages, was able to make some comparisons. She commented about one particular experience:

> She had us too much out of the book and I wished she would have eased us into it. My eighth grade teacher rarely used our books. She had music, lyrics and newspapers. She had us translate stories that weren't in the book. And that, I think, helps you pick up the language quicker.

Ed mentioned that he would change his beginning language experience in the following way; "I wish she would have done more activities," he said.

Students began foreign language study because it was a requirement. The second question posed to participants was "Why did you first decide to take a foreign language?" Student responses indicated overwhelming agreement with the notion that students began second language study either because it was a requirement imposed by their individual school or because it was a requirement for earning an Honors Diploma. Dori remarked "It wasn't an option, we had to take it." Tim elaborated by saying, "I took it [foreign language] because it was required for the Honors Diploma."

Although student interviews revealed that their initial language study was prompted by an external requirement, their continuance of language study was motivated by a focus on personal reasons. Some desired better communication skills and knowledge of the structure of the language while others prepared themselves for a future job market. Tim noted "I took it [foreign language] to be able to communicate and if you're bi-lingual, you have a better job market." Jon commented on his advanced

language study when he said, "I stuck with Spanish because there's going to be more Spanish-speaking people in the United States."

Beginning-level teachers match student goals. To culminate the section on initial language learning, students were asked; Did your teacher's activities match your goals for language learning? How? Student interviews reflected the notion that beginning-level teachers best matched students' goals for foreign language learning when they provided the students with a gradual immersion experience into the new language(s). Students spoke of the graduation of this experience in terms of both use of target language and coverage of content. In terms of pacing, Jon said, "I mean they [the teachers] didn't dive right in and go too hard and learn it all real fast. So they kind of lead a real good pace." Nan and Dori spoke of the graduated use of the new language. Nan commented, " She made things really easy and it just kind of stuck with us because she wasn't really forcing verbs down our throats or anything. In the beginning, it was English. After a while, it got to Spanish." The data reflected the idea that students preferred to eventually be exposed to greater amounts of the new, second language. Dori reiterated by saying, "We had a separation [between English and French]. That was important to me because if it was all English and we didn't speak any French and then next year she says 'dddd' and we'd be like, wait a minute. I don't understand."

Instructional Games

Preliminarily, questions regarding instructional games were not included in the interview protocol. After the initial two interviews were conducted and analyzed, student responses reflected the idea that language students perceived this activity to be an important factor in promoting second language learning. Henceforth, participants were

asked two questions regarding instructional games: a) Have instructional games been helpful in your language learning? b) If so, in which ways do you feel games have aided you in learning a second language? Four sub-themes emerged from the questions related to instructional games: Games made language learning easier, Instructional games were a source of motivation, Games make second language learning fun and Games were a forum for developing other important aspects of language learning. The aforementioned sub-categories are described and supported below.

Games made language learning easier. Respondents indicated that a teacher's inclusion of instructional games made the process of second language learning easier. The participants' responses indicated that the inclusion of games was not particular to the development of only one language skill; the learners mentioned that this particular activity had aided them in better learning both grammar and speaking skills. Jon said that, "Games help you speak without thinking about what you're saying." Tim mentioned that games provided students with an opportunity to try the new language. About games, he stated, "But as long as you're trying, I think that's what's important because that's where you learn whether you're doing it right or wrong." And, Mia added that the excitement of games disguised the fact that students were learning. She commented, "She [the teacher] puts French grammar into a game and you're learning and you don't know you're learning."

Instructional games were a source of motivation. When students were presented with open-ended questions soliciting ways in which games aided their language learning, their responses indicated that these particular activities served as a motivating factor in learning new second language content. Students commented that they wanted to learn

foreign language concepts for the sole purpose of being able to participate in instructional games in their classrooms. At the inception of her interview, Mia spoke in depth about a vocabulary game her teacher had organized for the students. The game was important in her learning, she said, "Because it [the game] helps you learn your vocabulary. It makes you want to know the vocabulary so you can play the games." Nan also added to the notion of games being a motivating force in her language learning. She said, "Games push you to learn what you're going to be doing. Games also push you because you don't want to be embarrassed in front of the class."

Games make second language learning fun. Another sub-category that emerged from the students' responses to the instructional games' questions was the notion that instructional games made second language learning more enjoyable. Jon said that he and his classmates enjoyed learning to speak through the use of an instructional game. He commented, "We've done individual contests where you can wear buttons or wear the sombrero for the class period, he [the teacher] tries to make the class fun." Dori also thought the inclusion of instructional games made learning both more interactive and more enjoyable. She remarked that "It's important to me to interact with different things such as French board games and just have fun with the language." Finally, Mia felt as though her teacher had made foreign language grammar fun through the use of an instructional game. She added, "I liked grammar because she [the teacher] made it fun. She puts it into a game and you're learning and you don't even know you're learning. She makes it [grammar] fun by putting it [grammar] into a game."

Games were a forum for developing other important aspects of language learning. As students spoke of their experiences with instructional games, a fourth sub-theme

emerged. Surprisingly, instructional games were promoting aspects of language learning that went beyond the introduction and or reinforcement of content. The inclusion of games provided an avenue for developing speaking skills, for promoting self-esteem among language learners, and for allowing students an opportunity to learn from each other. Jon and Tim both commented that instructional games had assisted them in learning to speak new languages. Jon mentioned," Games help you speak without thinking about what you're saying." Tim added, "They [games] give us a chance to try out the new language and that's where we learn." In terms of self-confidence as a foreign language student, responses indicated that games provided an avenue where students felt good about language learning. Nan commented that through games, "winning prizes made me feel good." Jon concurred when he said, "Games were part of establishing an environment where students felt comfortable learning a new language." Finally data indicated that students thought the inclusion of instructional games had given them opportunities to learn from each other. Mia stated, "Games put you in a whole group of people so if you don't know [the answer], somebody else knows it and then you're going to remember it [the answer] the next time. Nan added, "She had us do word games...but talking with other people really helped."

Classroom atmosphere

Because recent language learning literature, most especially, Standards in Foreign Language Learning (1996), focuses on the atmosphere in second language classrooms, students were asked their perceptions of classrooms where they most easily learned new languages. Within the larger theme of Classroom atmosphere, four sub-categories

emerged: Classroom realia, Noise level, Comfort and interactive learning environments. These related sub-themes are described and corroborated below.

Classroom realia. Student responses pointed to the idea that students felt they learned best in a language classroom where second language décor and music were used to create an atmosphere similar to the target culture. Tim perceived the room decorations to be an important aspect in his language learning. He commented that, "Posters with sayings and pictures helped lighten the atmosphere." Jon's thoughts were similar when he added, "Music and decorations made the atmosphere not tense." Students elaborated on the notion of music from the target culture. They felt that the inclusion of music in the foreign language classroom assisted them in learning a new language. Ed said that he learned best "when I was in a class where the teacher played Spanish music." When Mia was asked to describe the classroom where she learned best, she added, "We had a medium noise level with all different kinds of Spanish music."

Noise level. When students were asked to describe the environment in the ideal language classroom, the noise level was suggested as a topic for them to address. In nearly all interviews, students had very specific opinions regarding the noise level in ideal foreign language classrooms. When students were asked to describe their perceptions of most appropriate noise levels, data pointed to the notion that students preferred a medium noise level (a noise level with some conversation and background music or sounds) in their second language classrooms. Ed specifically stated that he favored a medium noise level. Nan commented that she preferred to go between a quiet and higher noise level. She also added, "What's really important [in terms of noise level] is that you have the students talking in the language."

Comfort. Although the notion of comfort in a second language classroom was not specifically included in the interview protocol, data analysis indicated that students perceived personal comfort in a foreign language classroom to be an important aspect in their second language learning. More specifically, students commented that they favored learning from language teachers with whom they felt comfortable, in classrooms where he working environment was not tense. Tim said that in a classroom where he easily learned a new language, "We could talk to her [the teacher] about anything. Her attitude- she was funny." Jon commented that personal comfort had affected his subsequent approach to learning tasks. He said, "His personal connection with students makes you feel comfortable, then you're not as bashful when it comes to reading a book or something. He made the atmosphere so it wasn't tense. We feel free to be open and talk."

Interactive learning environments. Analysis of student responses pointed to the idea that language learners felt they most easily learned new languages in environments that were interactive. Nan mentioned that not only the noise level, but also the amount of interaction with the second language had affected her development of foreign language speaking skills. She said for a teacher, "What's really important is that you have the students talk in the language. When my language class was very quiet, my phonetics weren't as good. It would be better for the teacher to encourage us to speak along with her." Jon and Dori concurred with Nan's idea of interactive experiences favorably influencing their speaking skills. Jon said that he preferred to "learn in a class where there is more interaction." He thought it was best to learn through a method where he is given chances to speak the language himself. Dori reiterated this point when she said,

"Speaking only French from level III was an important part of setting up an environment where I could learn."

Besides its influence on speaking, Nan perceived the interactive nature of a classroom to have an influence on the teacher's classroom control. Nan said that having high interaction from the students resulted in better classroom control. She added, "The teacher has less control when the class is not interactive."

Class camaraderie

Because the process of learning a foreign language can at times be an uncomfortable experience for adolescents, questions were included in the interview protocol that addressed the notion of classroom relationships in second language learning. Student perceptions revealed that the development of peer relationships in a foreign language classroom is a complex process. This is evident by the five sub-categories that emerged within the larger theme of Class camaraderie. These five sub-categories are detailed and supported below.

Student relationships. Because peer relationships are important to adolescent language learners, the interview protocol asked students to describe student- to- student relationships in a successful language learning experience. Data in this group relayed the idea that students perceived the best relationships in second language learning to be those where friendship and trust were encouraged and developed among classmates. The students spoke of being more comfortable speaking new languages with their classmates when they had been given opportunities to better know these peers. Nan commented that, "getting to know each other was the most important part of student relationships. It was

important because as an adolescent one is a bit uncomfortable anyway." Jon echoed this sentiment when he said,

> If you know people and you're on a team with them, then you feel more comfortable, you're not as nervous to say an answer because you know that if you get it wrong, they won't be mad at you.

Ed, although a near-native Spanish speaker, also felt that well-developed student relationships promoted better second language learning. He commented on the issues of friendship and trust in among foreign language students:

> The ones [students] I didn't know, I got to know better. It kind of helped me because we are friends now so we kind of trust each other with the language and try to help each other out. It's really important for a teacher to develop trust among students. Let's say you don't know anybody and they're correcting you and you think they're telling you "No, that's wrong" but, if it's your friend, you're thinking it's okay, he's just trying to help me out."

Student/teacher relationships. Students were not only asked to describe their relationships with their peers, but also the relationship between students and teachers in what they considered to be successful language learning experiences. Data in this category conveyed the idea that students perceived successful language learning experiences to be those that were highlighted by a student-teacher relationship where the teacher helped students feel comfortable by connecting to the learners on a personal level. Students perceived the phenomena of being comfortable with and personally connected to their language teacher as an avenue for making language learning easier for all participants. Tim suggested that the teacher having "personal affinity" with the students created this relationship. He remarked that, "If a teacher is not connected with the students, they don't want to learn for themselves. You [the teachers] have to have some way to reach out to them." Jon also felt the teacher's personal connection had positively affected his language learning:

> He asks me about sports and stuff. He tries to make a connection with students. It's important to my learning because you [the student] feel more comfortable with the teacher and won't be bashful when it comes to answering questions about a book or something.

The effects of group work on the way students learn. Because the development and implementation of group work is destined to affect relationships among language students, participants were asked to discuss ways in which group work had influenced their second language learning. Analysis of student responses regarding group work pointed to the idea that students perceive group activities to have affected their learning in two ways: the natural, diverse abilities among group participants have prompted learners to push themselves to better learn new languages or to learn how to help others learn a foreign language. Mia commented that when she was in a group activity with people who knew more, she was always trying to work up to their level, which helped her. She also said that in group situations, she not only pushed herself, but also used the experience to learn from her peers. She stated,

> I think I learn more when I'm in a group because there are things I don't know and they can kind of tell me, instead of me having to, instead of me learning something I already know, I'm learning what everyone else knows.

Other participants spoke of the second facet of group work; learning to help others learn a foreign language. Dori said,

> You know, we're all interested in French or Spanish and we all want to succeed in the class. And so, we all kind of stick together and we usually work together on stuff and it's like, okay, "I don't understand this. Can you help me?" And I think that's good because you can always go to them outside of class for help or you know they can always come to you for help.

Ed echoed the idea that the inclusion of group work in his language classroom had prompted students to help each other learn. He commented, " The group work helped me because we were kind of friends now so we trust each other and help each other out."

Group work and communication. One of the themes that emerged from the questions asked of students regarding group work was the idea that students perceived group activities to be helpful in foreign language learning. They perceived group activities to be beneficial because they provided better opportunities to communicate and interact with the new language than did individual work. Jon and Tim spoke of the opportunities to try new languages within the small group configurations. Jon commented that group work had helped him a lot with language learning:

> I think group work is helpful. It has helped me a lot. Because if you're in smaller groups, I guess it's more intimate, you get more chance to speak. It's not like the whole class participating at one time. And so we've done a lot of group work the last few years.

Tim concurred when he said, "It's easier to communicate in a group. That's important to students." Dori expounded upon their perceptions by commenting on the increased interaction that transpires in smaller groups and with a variety of classmates:

> Because it's different so that you get to interact with all the students in the class. It's not like, okay, you have this same group. Every time you have a different group so that you will get a chance to work with everyone and all the different students to make sure, you know, that you guys do get along and you're cooperating with each other.

Dori perceived teacher-assigned groups to be the best means of developing this increased interaction. Dori said, "It's important to assign the groups to get more interaction in the class."

Group work criteria. When students were asked if there were particular techniques their teachers had used to establish group work, another theme regarding student perceptions of group activities unfolded. Students perceived the ideal organization of group work to be one where, when group activities were organized, students were provided with criteria for group tasks before work began. They felt this

pre-established criterion gave a sense of structure and purpose to their cooperative learning scenarios. Nan commented that "Criteria beforehand gives you a structure to work with so that you're not left in mid-air." Mia echoed Nan's perception when she spoke of group work criteria. She added that the criteria let students know what was expected of them and helped dispel the practice of "doing activities off the top of your head." Mia also felt that pre-established group work guidelines also gave groups a goal that they knew that had to reach in order to complete their group assignments.

Spoken Language

As the movement toward communicative classrooms has taken hold, educators are eager to understand the characteristics of a classroom where using a new language is paramount, and where students and teachers can work together to create what Rivers (1987) calls "interaction." The Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996) also encourage teachers to establish an interactive setting where students can use target languages for real communication. In order to understand which instructional techniques students perceive to be most beneficial in helping them develop speaking skills, a battery of questions was presented to research participants. Students were asked their perceptions of instructional techniques across ten axioms related to learning to speak second languages. From these questions and follow-up discussion, ten sub-categories emerged. These ten sub-categories are related and supported in the following paragraphs.

Speaking skills and context. Data analysis revealed that students perceived the best activities for developing target language speaking skills were those in which a meaningful context was used to elicit the new spoken language. The prompts that teachers provided made a difference to students in their desire to speak second languages.

Jon commented that, " My teacher always tried to make a connection between students' real lives and the second language materials." Mia added that "having something personal" was also important to her speaking a new language. She said, "It's like, you're having this conversation and it's something you want to talk about and it's not something you have to talk about." She confirmed the idea that having something personal was important to her as a learner, "It's not like you're just reading out of a book or something," she concluded.

Speaking skills and group size. Students voiced the opinion that, when given the opportunity, they perceived the organization of small group activities to give them greater chance to speak new languages than large group instruction. Jon perceived small group activities to be an environment where students enjoyed working on their speaking skills. He said, "When we get in groups and he [the teacher] gives us a topic to write about [for presentation], it's kind of fun because it gives people a chance to act kind of silly." He also added, "I think group work is helpful. It has helped me a lot. Because if you're in smaller groups, I guess it's more intimate, you get more chance to speak. It's not the whole class participating at one time." Nan even preferred small group settings for her oral language tests. "Oral tests helped me learn to speak. She would speak to us and you know, she wouldn't give us tough questions but she would try to give us questions where as long as we picked up on the gist of it, we could speak to her."

Oral repetition and language skills. Student responses revealed the idea that students perceive oral repetition to be helpful in their learning speaking, grammar and pronunciation skills in second languages. Mia commented that the more she heard her

teacher use specific words or phrases, the easier it became for her to speak the new language:

> And then you hear how the dialogue is and that helps you understand like what words sound like what. Like the "gn" sound, like in onion and stuff like that. It's just easier to hear her say it because the more you hear her say it, the easier it is for you to say it.

Nan echoed this perception of repetition leading to mastery when she said, "He [the teacher] used a lot of repetition. He would take words and keep drumming them into our heads. After a while, you just kind of picked up on the words." Jon and Nan also pointed to the notion of oral repetition assisting them in learning grammar. Jon said that his teacher's oral grammar warm-ups often came back to him at test time. He commented, "If we're doing a test and we have the subjunctive, sometimes it helps. We just go through the little warm-up we did, it kind of makes sense. You remember the order." Nan said that she perceived her teacher's repetition of printed dialogues to have been helpful in her learning language structure and pronunciation. She added, "We would read the dialogue out loud together and then she [the teacher] would play the cassette tape, then she would have us say it by ourselves, and that really helped." Dori, among others, perceived oral repetition to have been a helpful technique in learning to pronounce sounds and words in target languages:

> We had a lot of phonics where we would take like, each alphabet or each group of words and pronounce them and we were even tested over them so we would have like, a big long list of phonics and like, all the different sounds and you know, it could even work for Spanish. It was really good. So then we got to learn to pronounce them with this accent or with that accent. And she was really strict on it. She was like, "You have to know these five in order to say the words." Which was true.

Dori perceived this technique to be quite helpful in learning to say foreign words and mentioned that she wished her teachers would have used this system earlier in her language study and with more frequency as her language skills developed.

Incentives encourage speaking. When students were asked questions regarding specific techniques their teachers had used to motivate them to speak target languages, the inclusion of participation grades arose in most interviews. The majority of the students interviewed perceived the incorporation of participation grades to be an important facet in their learning to speak second languages. However, when posed with more specific questions regarding the organization of such a grade, (how points were tracked, percentage of the grade etc.) students did not reach any particular consensus on how this instructional component was organized. They simply conveyed the idea that their participation in second language discourse should have an affect on the course grade and ultimately, they said, had an affect on how much new language they learned. Jon commented about participation being linked to a grade:

> I think so because I mean, you'd kind of feel bad if you sat back there the whole period and didn't say anything. I'd feel bad if somebody sat there the whole period and didn't say anything and then got an "A" just because they got all the questions right on the test but they didn't really participate. I think if you participate, you're going to learn anyway. So I think it's important either way.

Ed added that the incentive of the grade had pushed him to speak more Spanish. He said, "I wouldn't speak as much if I didn't have incentives. You [the language student] try harder if you know that it's [the participation] affecting your grade."

Besides the participation grade, students spoke of other incentives that had encouraged them to want to speak second languages. They commented that, especially, in early language experiences, incentives had encouraged them to try new languages. Jon

said, " I was prompted to speak Spanish when my teacher organized a game for extra credit points." He added that when his teacher used this forum as a means of having students practice new grammar, Jon felt very encouraged to speak the target language. Nan added that when her teacher organized an activity with rewards, she was prompted to participate. She said, "The prizes for games made me feel like I wanted to speak."

Gestures and facial expressions. Participants were asked if their foreign language teachers had used particular facial expressions or gestures that learners had perceived to be helpful in the acquisition of second languages. Analysis of the data revealed the notion that the teachers' employment of gestures and expressions had assisted students in better understanding both auditory prompts and segments of second language literature. Ed commented that his teacher's expressive style of reading foreign language literature had assisted him in understanding literary passages. Ed remarked "When he [the teacher] reads, he expresses himself in a poetic way. He makes gestures and motions like if he were acting it [the literature] out." Nan said that she perceived one of her teacher's animated styles of speaking Spanish to be very helpful in understanding auditory prompts. She commented that this gesturing was especially helpful to a beginning language student.

> She was the one who did most of the talking in Spanish and she would act things out very well so that if we didn't understand her words, we would catch on to what she was talking about. We would look at her arms flailing, or at her facial expression, and that was very helpful.

Introduction of vocabulary. Because language teachers struggle with the practice of limiting English translation when introducing vocabulary, the researcher was

interested to learn how students perceived this practice to affect their progress in learning a new language. Data analysis revealed that students overwhelmingly perceive the best technique for introducing target language vocabulary to be one that does not include the teacher's use of English. Students perceive the most effective introduction of vocabulary to be a technique that does not include translation, but does provide them with a context for learning the new words. They mentioned that the teachers' use of pictures, cues and gestures were all helpful in providing a comprehensible context for learning vocabulary. Dori summarized her perceptions of best techniques for learning vocabulary. She commented, "I think we can do that [translation] ourselves. I would like them [the teachers] to say this is how you use the word(s) or this is the context in which the word goes." Nan described her teacher's use of gestures in helping the students understand new words. She said that her teacher's use of gestures had prompted students to save themselves the additional step of setting the English word in their minds and translating it into Spanish. Nan said with gesturing, "We go right into thinking in the new language." Tim concurred with other students on his preference for avoiding translation when learning new vocabulary. He perceived the inclusion of pictures to be helpful in his learning new words. He added, though, that there are times when pictures cannot convey detailed differences between two similar objects. He noted an exception when pictures did not assist him best in learning new words. " If we're speaking in nouns, I like the pictures better unless it's some obscure item like a pen or a felt pen or ballpoint pen. I mean, they're all ink pens, but they're different pens."

Visuals. Because providing students with a visual is a means of providing context in vocabulary and grammar introduction, students were asked if and how the utilization

of visuals had affected their language learning. Data analysis revealed students' preference for the inclusion of visuals in their second language classrooms. Students perceived the use of visuals to be helpful in providing them both context and clues for the introduction of vocabulary and grammar. Mia elaborated on this perception when she mentioned that her teacher's use of visuals when introducing weather terminology had allowed her to have an accurate picture of the concept her teacher was trying to convey. Having the picture, she said, allowed her to have more than just something she imagined in her own mind. Dori preferred the inclusion of visuals when her teacher presented vocabulary because it gave the new word context. She compared this technique to the utilization of second language movies in high school classrooms:

> If you get to see a picture then you get to know what the word is and how it's supposed to be used, like the movie, for example. You wouldn't just want the words of the movie without the actual picture.

Expressions related to classroom routines. Because many second language textbooks begin with the introduction of vocabulary and expressions related to classroom routines, the researcher was interested to know if students preferred to learn these expressions through a systematic introduction of such material or if they preferred to learn the material through daily use. Data analysis revealed that students overwhelmingly perceived a formal introduction of vocabulary related to classroom routines to be unnecessary. The participants perceived the best means of learning these expressions to be the teacher's repetition of such vocabulary as necessitated by normal classroom experiences. Two of the many responses indicating the students' perception of "learning by doing" as the most effective way to learn classroom expressions were Ed and Nan. Nan said, "We learn to do little phrases and they're really easy to pick up on

because it's something that you ask all the time like, "Can I go to the bathroom?" In regard to vocabulary about classroom routines, Ed added, "I think you should learn from having to use them."

Grammar explanations. As students advance in their study of second language, it is common for grammatical explanations to move from English into the target language. Because the study included only advanced-level second language students, the researcher sought to understand student perceptions regarding the explanation of grammar in second languages. Specifically, did students perceive the introduction of grammar in Spanish, for example, helpful in prompting them to speak more Spanish? Data analysis revealed that students perceive the introduction of grammar in the target language is not a helpful means of learning more of the new language. They voiced the preference for having the teacher initially introduce new grammar concepts in English and then provide appropriate follow-up explanations in the target language. The majority of the responses conveyed the idea that the introduction of grammar is not an inherently comfortable experience for language learners and therefore the teachers' reliance on second language explanations compounds this discomfort. Nan summarized this sentiment when she said of her teacher's explanation in French, "I can't really latch onto what I'm supposed to do." Jon was also uncomfortable when grammar was explained entirely in Spanish. He commented, "If you try to explain it [grammar] in Spanish and you miss a word and it doesn't make sense, you kind of get lost in the translation." Although students perceived initial grammar explanations in the second language to be cumbersome, data analysis pointed to the fact that follow-up explanations of grammatical concepts were perceived by the students to be beneficial in their learning. Tim echoed others' sentiments when he

said, "She [the teacher] may explain grammar in English first, and then explain it [grammar] in the other language because the more you hear the explanation, the more you understand."

Preference of spoken model. The recent emphasis on communicative classrooms in foreign language teaching has supported the notion that teachers are more proficient in speaking target languages than were expected to be during previous foreign language instructional movements. Therefore, students should be experiencing their teacher's employment of the second language as well as hearing the new language from other sources. This phenomenon prompted the inclusion of questions regarding students' preferences for spoken models in their foreign language classrooms. Which type of spoken model, (audiotape, teacher, videotape or computer) did students perceive to be most helpful and why? Students were also asked if their preference regarding spoken models had changed as their language study progressed.

In regard to models, data analysis pointed to the idea that students voiced a strong preference for the teacher and target language videotapes to serve as the spoken models in their classrooms. Their perception of preference for second language model did not change as their language study progressed. Student responses to these questions indicated that the provision of second language videotapes and teacher models allowed students to best understand the context of new vocabulary and grammar in foreign language learning.

Students perceived their teacher to be one of the most important spoken models in their language classrooms. Their comments pointed to the idea that the teacher was an important model because he or she was the most often heard speaker and because through

interactive experiences, the teacher could pause for points of clarification. Mia noted that the teacher was the easiest model to understand:

> She is the one that speaks it the most and then after we listen to her speak it, we might watch a video with some French people speaking it. It's easier to hear her though because she can say it slower so you can understand exactly what she's saying. The people on the videotape, they just rattle it right off and you don't know what they're saying.

Data also revealed that students perceived foreign language videos to be helpful spoken models. The visual clues and inherent context of the tapes were perceived beneficial in understanding new languages. Nan mentioned that she preferred the videotapes to audiocassettes because of the pictures that were provided by this media. Jon added that the pictures also gave him a better sense of what was happening within the dialogue and provided context for the new words. Dori perceived videotapes to be helpful in more than just understanding new vocabulary. She said that within movies she could hear and see the inclusion of grammar. She noted, "when you see it [grammar] in the movies, you get a sense of word composition as well as recognizing the words they're using.

Written language

In order to learn how students perceived they could best learn written forms of foreign languages, four core questions were posed to participants. This section details students' perceptions regarding the process of interacting with written forms of the target languages: Language rules first followed by examples, Ancillary activities related to reading, Interactive activities in transferring grammar into speaking, Understanding the written word through the process of writing.

Language rules first followed by examples. Because most teachers struggle with the decision of introducing grammar in a deductive or inductive fashion, it was important for the students to express their perceptions of the most effective way to learn new grammar. Overwhelmingly, students perceive an inductive grammar presentation to be the easiest to follow. Students mentioned that they prefer to first be given a new grammar rule from the target language and then to be provided with examples applicable to that particular rule. Dori said, "I think the grammar rules should be given first so that you can learn to use it [the rule] and how to put it together than the other way." Nan echoed Dori's sentiments. She commented, "I like knowing the rule first and then going from there."

Ancillary activities related to reading. When asked to describe the strategies their language teachers had utilized to help students to understand foreign literature, participants spoke of their perceived preference for the inclusion of ancillary activities. Students perceived the inclusion of ancillary activities before and during the process of reading foreign literature to be helpful in their better understanding new words. Jon commented about literature-related activities:

> I think outlines and vocabulary lists are important because a lot of times we read a novel or poem or something and you don't understand it because we've been taught the definition out of the dictionary so that [the list or outline] kind of helps. It explains and has a list of what the words are.

Mia verified Jon's perception of ancillary activities related to literature:

> My teachers have used things like outlines and vocabulary lists before we read like when we were reading some stories about a detective, we did some body parts and stuff like that and she gave us a whole list, just stuff you wouldn't know otherwise and then if you were reading the story and you didn't know what it [a word] was, you had the vocab list to go back to.

Interactive activities in transferring grammar into speaking. Students were asked what they perceived to be the best technique for prompting learners to transfer new grammatical concepts into situations where the target language was spoken. Participants expressed the perception that interactive activities were the best technique for attaining this goal. Dori summarized one of her preferred techniques when she commented,

> If we learned new tenses in French, at the end of the chapter we have to do a dialogue over the entire chapter. The verb tenses would be included in the dialogue. If we learned new vocabulary words, she'll [the teacher] use the words and ask you to put them into a sentence. So, you kind of figure out how it's spoken and how it's used."

Mia conferred the perceived preference for interaction in learning grammar, "When she provides activities, it's like you're having this conversation about something you did last summer or something you will do next summer and you want to talk about it...it's not something you have to talk about."

Understanding the written word through the process of writing. Although not directly linked to a particular question, a theme that emerged through data gathered from participants was the idea that students perceived they better understood written forms of second languages when they had to write the new language themselves. Nan commented, "I have better understood the written language by writing compositions, just writing out papers in the language." Dori added that she perceived the preparation of vocabulary cards to be beneficial in her learning. She said, "In Spanish, we have to prepare vocabulary cards and I think that helps me because if I look at the book and then copy words down and the meaning, I learn faster because I have written it down and am looking at it." Tim added that he perceived written explanations of language concepts to also be helpful. He commented, "I prefer most of the explanation come from notes."

Assessment

During the interview process, students were asked to describe what techniques they perceived to have been beneficial in assessing their progress in learning new languages. Through the process of data analysis, three sub-categories emerged which reflected students' perceived preferences for assessment activities in their second language classrooms: Error correction, Oral and written tests, and Informal assessments. These three sub-categories are detailed and corroborated below.

Error correction. Although not initially included as a question or topic posed to participants in this study, the practice of error correction in language learning was a topic suggested by the students. After this topic had been mentioned by two students, subsequent participants were asked if oral error correction was perceived to be beneficial in their learning new languages. Eventually, data revealed that students did not dislike error correction in the presence of their classmates, but preferred that such correction be temporally close to their mistake. They also perceived error correction to be beneficial in foreign language learning. Tim noted, "Correction is okay if done in front of my classmates. I don't have any problem with it. It helps me learn because if they make a mistake, that's why we need to be paying attention to what they're saying." He also added, in regard to the timing of error correction, "you like it to be right then instead of waiting until the end."

Oral and written tests. When students were asked whether they perceived written or oral tests to be most beneficial in their language learning, their responses indicated that they perceived both formats to be helpful in learning new languages. Jon remarked that he profited most from oral assessment. He said,

> I think the best tests are the oral tests that we have. We have to go up to his [the teacher's] desk and he asks us questions for like five minutes and we answer. That's probably a better grade on how much you progress because you understand somebody else, not somebody you talk to all the time, like, your partner."

Mia was one of the students who perceived written tests to be of the most benefit. She commented,

> I like the written tests a little better. Because, I know the words. I know how to figure out sentences if they're down on paper and I can memorize the sentences, but when I speak it, sometimes I get lost and sometimes I get nervous because you're speaking in front of everybody and it's like [cites a French example] but if you're writing on paper, it's only between you and the teacher.

Informal assessment. Students were asked if they perceived informal assessment activities, such as thumbs-up, to have been helpful in their language learning. Students remarked that they believed informal assessments were helpful, but only when such activities were framed in a positive manner. Jon and Ed both commented that the employment of such techniques by the teacher encouraged them. Jon added, "As long as you encourage the student, but if it tells you like, you're stupid or something and it's wrong, you're not going to want to speak any more." Ed spoke of motivation. " It [thumbs-up and shaking his head] kind of motivate me."

Culture

Students were asked questions concerning their perceptions of the most effective instructional techniques for learning about the target cultures of the languages they studied. From discussion about learning the cultures of second language environments, two sub-categories emerged. Students spoke of activities that enabled them to learn about the daily lives of native speakers of second languages. They also related information regarding their perceptions of activities which best enabled them to learn about "The big C culture," a term language teachers use to refer to the inclusion of art,

history and music within second language cultures. These two sub-categories are described and supported below.

Learning the Perspective of the native speaker. Participants' comments pointed to the idea that one of the best techniques for students to learn about other cultures was by learning about the perspective of native speakers. Students commented that they best understood the perspective of native speakers when their teachers shared these ideas via videotapes, discussions, stories, field trips and movies. Dori said she benefited from anecdotal observations made by her French teacher:

> She will tell us about how we take different foods and stuff for granted and how they have smaller portions and don't usually throw stuff away and she was telling us today how in the cafeteria she sees people just grab a handful of napkins to wipe up a little spill and how they don't, they conserve their paper because they don't have a lot of trees and she was like, "When somebody does that, I just want to choke them because they don't have a lot of trees and they take paper so seriously and they don't have a lot of it."

Jon commented that his teacher had assisted them in learning about new cultures by having the students engage in role-playing exercises. He said, "Like, we wrote like we were in a group in a subway or something. We were the ticket taker or the token taker and that helps." Ed also added that guest speakers and field trips had helped him to better understand the perspective of native speakers:

> He's had in guest speakers and we've gone to … College and they have had a special day, I'm not sure if it's a Spanish festival or something like that but they have a day there and there's a field trip and we go there and that helps.

Culture with a big "C." Students comments regarding their perceptions about the best practices for learning about target cultures pointed to the idea that they learned through activities that focused on what language teachers call, culture with a big "C." Culture with a big "C" is the culture of the foreign country that concentrates on learning

about the history, art and music of another land. Learners added that they perceived the most effective techniques for introducing this aspect of culture to be the inclusion of projects, cultural readings, and music. Mia stated,

> In our books there's culture sections, like little culture corners or something and it will explain things and she'll go over and over and over and then sometimes on the tests there will be like, five culture questions and you kind of just remember because you just went over them.

Jon also commented that cultural readings had been important to his understanding new cultures:

> Last year there was a certain spot in our book we did and it had like three pages on culture, just like samples or something different and we'd study that for a day or so and do a little project like make a temple out of cardboard or something.

Summary

This chapter has presented the eight themes and their corresponding sub-categories that emerged in data analysis from student interviews and open-ended statements regarding learner perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. The analysis provided insights into the meaning foreign language students construct as recipients of a variety of instructional techniques in the instruction of second languages. The next chapter will detail the outcomes of the study and provide applications of the students' perceptions in order to formulate better instructional techniques in the teaching of foreign languages.

Chapter 5

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES THAT PROMOTE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Introduction

This study was designed to examine student perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. Advanced-level foreign language students from throughout central Indiana shared their perceptions of instructional techniques in foreign language learning. In this chapter, six outcomes are discussed as they related to students' perceptions of instructional techniques that promote second language learning. These outcomes are: Students are motivated to learn foreign languages through the inclusion of a variety of ancillary activities, Students learn foreign languages best when provided with activities where interaction with the second language occurs, Students learn foreign languages best when there is structure provided in their learning experiences, Students learn foreign languages best when taught within a meaningful context, Students learn foreign languages best in classrooms where personal relationships are developed and Students learn foreign languages best in environments where they feel comfortable.

The outcomes are applied to formulating best practices for current and future teachers of foreign languages. The outcomes are triangulated using citations from expert sources, insights from the researcher's nine years of teaching experience and from interviews conducted with advanced-level language learners. Insights into improving

instructional techniques are presented at the end of this chapter. These insights relate to improving the utilization and implementation of instructional techniques for current foreign language teachers. Such insights will also link this study's outcomes to the improved preparation of future foreign language teachers.

Students Are Motivated to Learn Foreign Languages Through the Inclusion of a Variety of Ancillary Activities

In regard to best practices in foreign language instruction, these students perceived the most effective techniques to be those where their teachers had included a variety of ancillary (outside of the textbook) materials and activities in the presentation of language content and skills. Students did not perceive their own foreign language textbook to be an essential component in their learning to speak, understand, read or write in a second language. In fact, none of the participants mentioned his or her textbook being an important component in learning second languages.

These students felt they benefited from and were motivated by the variety of materials, methods and activities utilized by their second language teachers that went beyond the realm of the traditional textbook. Students perceived the inclusion of music, dialogues, newspapers, games and guest speakers to have been advantageous in second language learning. These students favored the prescription suggested by Galloway and Labarca (1990) who commented that, "What is called for is not a teaching method, but a teaching repertoire" (p. 115). Nan, who had studied two languages with several teachers, made some comparisons. She said, " My eighth grade teacher rarely used our books. She had music, lyrics and newspapers. She had us translate stories that weren't in the book. And that, I think, helps you pick up the language quicker."

The inclusion of variety of ancillary materials and activities was especially helpful to students during their initial years of language study. This variety prompted students to be motivated to utilize their new language skills. Likewise, literature in second language learning has supported the provision of a wide variety of instructional techniques is part of developing oral proficiency (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). In a related fashion, the Indiana Professional Standards Board has compiled its Standards for Foreign Language Teachers and recommends that the foreign language teacher "select from a range of teaching approaches that are known to be effective in meeting the diverse needs of learners" (p. 2, Indiana Professional Standards Board). Among study participants, Jon and Nan both commented that their teachers' inclusion of a range of activities in early language experiences had prompted them to want to learn and use the new materials. Jon said of his first year of learning Spanish, "I was prompted to speak Spanish when my teacher organized a game for extra credit points." He added that when his teacher used this forum as a means of having students practice new grammar, he felt very encouraged to speak the new language. Nan added that during her early years of language study, "When my teacher organized an activity with rewards, I was prompted to participate."

The inclusion of ancillary activities was not only important to the students in terms of learning to speak and understand new languages, but also was important in their learning about the culture of the second language community. The students commented that they better understood the perspective of the native speakers when their teachers used videotapes, dancing, discussions, stories, field trips and movies in their classrooms.

Similarly, Maley (1987) summarized the benefits of bringing the authentic examples of the target culture into the classroom when he remarked that activities such as

songs, music and dance help students understand the cultural ethos or underlying sentiments of a culture.

In essence, the students benefited from their teachers' willingness to configure activities that brought the second language culture right into the classroom. Jon commented that his teacher had assisted the class in learning about new cultures by having the students engage in role-playing exercises. Jon added that the best scenarios developed by his teachers were the ones where students took authentic second culture roles. We didn't "just play the typical waiter in a restaurant scene." He said, "Like we wrote like we were in a group in a subway or something. We were the ticket taker or the token taker and that helps." Ed also added that guest speakers and field trips had helped him to better understand the perspective of native speakers:

> He's had in guest speakers and we've gone to ... College and they have had a special day, I'm not sure if it's a Spanish festival or something like that but they have a day where there's a field trip and we go there and that helps.

Students Learn Foreign Languages Best When Provided With Activities Where Interaction With the Second Language Occurs

The students perceived the most effective activities for learning foreign language concepts to be those where they were given the opportunity to apply their understandings of second language material during interactive experiences. The students felt that such opportunities to interact with their new language not only allowed them to immediately find application for new concepts, but also made learning enjoyable. The students' perceived preferences for interactive experiences in language classes echoed Rivers'

(1987) definition of the current era of language teaching, one that is highlighted by "the elicitation of willing student participation and initiative" (p. 10).

Throughout their language experiences, the students had encountered interactive activities that they perceived to aid them in learning new languages. Dori, Mia and Tim felt that their teachers had provided interaction and enjoyable learning scenarios through the incorporation of instructional games in their classrooms. Instructional games provided the forum for interaction and enjoyable learning. Dori remarked, "It's important to me to interact with different things such as French board games and just have fun with the language." Mia added that her teacher had made grammar more enjoyable by putting concepts into an instructional game. She said, "I like grammar because she made it fun. She puts it [grammar] into a game and you're learning and you don't even know you're learning. She makes it fun by putting it into a game." Tim summarized the benefits of including games for interactive purposes. He commented, "They [games] give us a chance to try out the new language and that's where we learn."

Interactive activities had also influenced the students' development of speaking skills in the new language. The students equated opportunity to speak with improved speaking skills in the target language. Nan mentioned that one important factor in the development of her speaking skills was the amount of interaction in her foreign language classes. She said, for a teacher, "What's really important is that you have the student talk in the language. When my language class was very quiet, my phonetics weren't as good. It would be better for the teacher to encourage us to speak along with her." Jon also said that he preferred to learn in a class where "there is more interaction." He added that he

perceived the best method for language learning to be one where he is given a chance to speak the language himself.

Students Learn Foreign Languages Best When There Is Structure Provided In Their Learning Experiences

Sizer (1992) said one necessary condition for schools is clarity about goals. He wrote, "Teachers and students must know what is to be expected and at what standard" (p. 43). Foreign Language students perceived the most effective instructional techniques to be those which inherently had a certain amount of structure. The students spoke favorably of those aspects of their language learning where they knew what behaviors and outcomes were expected of them as learners.

The students perceived their teachers' purposeful assignment of group members to have had positive side effects in their language classrooms. This teacher-induced organization had not only prompted the students to better know their classmates but, as Mia stated, had allowed them to "learn what everyone else knows." Dori also commented that increased interaction occurred when students were assigned to cooperative learning groups. She appreciated the times her teacher had structured the groups as it gave the students a chance to work with a large variety of classmates. Dori said,

> Because it's different so that you get to interact with all the students in the class. It's not like, okay, you have this same group. Every time you have a different group so that you will get a chance to work with everyone and all the different students to make sure, you know, that you guys do get along and you're cooperating with each other.

In the literature, Sizer (1992) echoed the benefits these students perceived as an outcome of group work activities, when he related that cooperative learning scenarios allow learners to consider perspectives other than their own, an outcome that cannot be attained through lecture or mere listening.

In regard to the organization of group activities, Kramsch (1987) has noted that the provision of introductory material and constraints given to students before they begin group work can reduce uncertainty and anxiety in group-controlled situations. The students echoed this perspective when they said they appreciated the structure teachers had given them once cooperative learning groups had been established. The students perceived the ideal organization of group work to be one where, when group activities were organized, students were provided with criteria before group work began. They felt this pre-established criterion gave a sense of structure and purpose to their cooperative learning scenarios. Nan commented that "Criteria beforehand gives you a structure to work with so that you're not left in mid-air." Mia echoed Nan's perception. She added that criteria let students know what was expected of them and helped dispel the practice of "doing activities off the top of your head." Mia also felt that pre-established group work guidelines also gave groups a goal that they knew they had to reach in order to complete their group assignments.

The students also thought the provision of structure in activities that specifically focused on learning to speak new languages had been beneficial. In the literature, Lee and VanPatten (1995) support the provision of structure in communicative experiences because they note that language learners need to understand the goal of their communications. Without pre-determined goals, they note, learners may wander into open-ended communication that is above their linguistic ability and eventually results in discouragement (Lee and VanPatten, 1995). One of the structures learners said had benefited their oral language learning was their teachers' encouragement of students building a foundation in pronunciation of sounds and words in early language experiences. The students said they continually relied on this groundwork throughout their language learning. Dori, among others, spoke of the value of having foreign words and sounds repeated and assessed until they provided students with a foundation for learning new material. She said, "We had a lot of phonics where we would take like each

alphabet or each group of words and pronounce them and we were even tested over them so we would have like a big long list of phonics and like all the different sounds...." Also, in terms of speaking the new language, students perceived an established participation grade to be an important component in their language learning. Although this concept could not be confirmed by writings in second language instruction, the students felt that a pre-established system for tracking participation not only encouraged students to speak, but ultimately resulted in increased language learning. Jon commented about participation being linked to a grade and the inequity of students receiving a good grade and not participating. He thought that participation equaled learning in a language classroom. "I think if you participate you're going to learn anyway," he added.

Students Learn Foreign Languages Best When Taught Within A Meaningful Context

Within many of the perceptions students expressed regarding instructional techniques that promote language learning, the notion of context emerged as element interwoven throughout their reflections of language learning experiences. Students perceived the provision of a meaningful context to be an important backdrop to the introduction or practice of target language materials. The delivery of instruction within a meaningful context has been described by Omaggio-Hadley (1993) who writes that "Opportunities must be provided for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture" (p. 79).

Whereas most foreign language textbooks begin with a section detailing classroom expressions, (Schmitt and Woodford, 1995; Samaniego, 1993) students did not see this delivery as ideal in terms of learning to understand classroom routines. Instead, students commented that the easiest way to learn to negotiate meaning in a second language classroom was through the teacher's and students' repeated use of such vocabulary as necessitated by normal classroom experiences within a meaningful context. Nan mentioned that she perceived the acquisition of classroom expressions to be easy to

accomplish. Nan said..."they're really easy to pick up on because it's something you ask all the time."

The students also perceived the most effective introduction of vocabulary to be a technique that did not include oral translation, but provided them with a meaningful context for learning new words. They mentioned that their teachers' use of pictures, cues and gestures were all helpful in providing a comprehensible and yet, meaningful context for understanding new words. Dori emphasized the need for teachers to provide students with context in presenting new materials in a second language classroom. She remarked that translation was easily enough completed by the students themselves. She would like her teachers to say, "this is how you use the word or this is the context in which the word goes."

The students' perceived preference for spoken models in their language classrooms again echoed their desire to have meaningful context provided when learning a foreign language. When asked if they preferred audiotapes, computer programs, videotapes or their teacher to serve as the primary model for speaking the target language, students overwhelmingly preferred to have their own teachers and videotapes be the models in their classrooms. The combination of the visual elements and the spoken word gave students the meaningful context they needed to best understand new vocabulary and grammar in the foreign language. Omaggio-Hadley (1993) supports the need for students to be provided with visual cues when the goal of listening comprehension exists. She supports the inclusion of videotaped materials which she notes, "...can be especially useful at the lower ranges of proficiency because of the visual contextual support they provide" (p. 170). Nan also mentioned that she preferred videotapes to audiocassettes because of the pictures that were provided by this media. Jon added that pictures gave him a better sense of what was happening within a dialogue and "provided context for the new words." Dori also perceived videotapes to be helpful.

About grammar, she noted, "When you see it in the movies, you get a sense of word composition as well as recognizing the words they're using."

Students Learn Foreign Languages Best In Classrooms Where Personal Relationships Are Developed

Because the process of learning a second language and practicing new sounds can, at times, be an uncomfortable process for adolescents, discussion was initiated in regard to relationships in foreign language classrooms. Students felt they profited from developing personal, trustful, working relationships with both their peers and teachers. Students felt more comfortable learning second languages when they had been given opportunities to develop friendships with their classmates. The students' perception of the positive contributions their relationships had made toward language learning is described in the literature and in their own comments. For example, Rivers (1987) wrote that in order to achieve interactive language instruction, the ambiance and relationships in the foreign language classroom must promote a desire for interaction. Ed, although a near-native Spanish speaker, also realized that the development of friendships in his Spanish class had been helpful in his learning more of his family's first language. He commented on issues of trust and friendship among learners. "The ones I didn't know, I got to know better. It kind of helped me because we are friends now so we kind of trust each other with the language," he stated. Nan felt more comfortable learning a language in a classroom where she knew other students. She added, "Getting to know each other was the most important part of student relationships. It was important because as an adolescent one is a bit uncomfortable anyway."

The students also perceived the phenomena of being comfortable with and personally connected to their language teacher as an avenue for making language learning easier for all participants. Students perceived a personal teacher-student connection to be a means of motivating learners to engage in activities offered by the foreign language

teacher. Jon liked the activities his teacher created which were highlighted by "a connection between students' real lives and second language materials." He mentioned that when his teacher had taken the time to know students on a personal level, it had made him "feel more comfortable with the teacher and not bashful when it came to answering questions about a book or something." Mia also added that "having something personal" was important to her learning to speak a new language. She said, " It's like you're having this conversation and it's something you want to talk about and it's not something you have to talk about." Tim summarized strong teacher-student relationships by remarking that teachers need to be connected to students or "they don't want to learn for themselves." He suggested that teachers "have to have some way to reach out to them [the students]."

Students Learn Foreign Languages Most Easily In Environments Where They Feel Comfortable

The concept of being comfortable was an important backdrop to the students' perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. They emphasized the importance of their teachers' establishment of an environment where all facets of learning were delivered in a comfortable fashion. As suggested by Omaggio-Hadley (1993), teachers need to consider the affective side of foreign language teaching. The sentiment of comfort was expressed in the student perceptions about such diverse elements of the language learning process as pacing, classroom realia, classroom atmosphere, and introduction of grammar and assessment.

The students perceived a comfortable pace to be an important aspect of designing a foreign language program. They preferred to be offered a gradual introduction to grammar and immersion experiences. In terms of pacing, Jon said, "I mean they [the teachers] didn't dive right in and go too hard and learn it all real fast. So they kind of lead a real good pace." Nan spoke of her teachers' comfortable pacing in the introduction

of grammatical concepts in the new language. She favored one teacher's pace, in particular. Nan remarked, "She made things really easy and it just kind of stuck with us because she wasn't really forcing verbs down our throats or anything." Students did prefer that a graduated process of immersion occur until they reached a level where they were more frequently hearing and speaking new languages. Their perception, however, was that the most effective technique was one where they were comfortably expected to increase their own use of new languages as their language study proceeded. Dori reiterated the perception that it was important to her to have a separation between English and French because if "we didn't speak any French then next year she says 'dddd' and we'd be like wait a minute. I don't understand." Despite the students' agreement that they perceived the need for teachers to set comfortable levels of pacing and second language immersion, the perception of the learner was not supported in the literature.

The students also perceived a comfortable atmosphere for learning target languages to be one where teachers had used classroom décor and music to create an atmosphere similar to the cultures being studied. Tim perceived the room decorations to be an important aspect of his language learning. He commented that, "Posters with sayings and pictures helped lighten the atmosphere." Students also perceived the inclusion of music in their language classrooms to be an important component of establishing a learning environment that was comfortable. Jon commented that his teacher had used "music and decorations so the atmosphere was not tense."

The students perceived a comfortable relationship with their teacher to be an instructional component that promoted language learning. The students favored learning from language teachers with whom they felt comfortable, in a classroom where the atmosphere was not tense. Learner preference for comfortable relationships is described in the literature by Glasser (1990) who noted that students described good teachers as those who related to them on their own level and with whom they feel personally comfortable. Tim, who spoke four languages, also perceived the ideal classroom to be

one where the teacher had a "personal affinity" with students. "We could talk to her about anything. Her attitude, she was funny." Jon commented that personal comfort with his teacher had influenced subsequent learning tasks. His said his teacher's personal connection with students "paid off" when the teacher pushed students to delve into foreign language literature or other aspects of language learning that otherwise weren't necessarily favored by the students.

The introduction of grammar was not perceived to be an inherently comfortable experience for secondary language students and therefore the teacher's reliance of second language explanations had compounded this discomfort. Nan summarized this sentiment, when she said of her teacher's explanation in French, "I can't really latch onto what I'm supposed to do." The students clamored for their teachers to make grammatical explanations a more comfortable experience by initially introducing these concepts in English with follow-up explanation in the new language. Jon, who was also "uncomfortable" when grammar was explained entirely in Spanish, shared his perception. "If you try to explain it [grammar] in Spanish and you miss a word and it doesn't make sense, you get lost in the translation."

Also, in regard to assessment activities, the foreign language students perceived a comfortable atmosphere to promote better second language learning. For example, students remarked that they believed informal assessments were helpful, but only when such activities were framed in a positive manner. Jon and Ed both commented that the employment of such techniques by the teacher encouraged them. Jon added, "As long as you encourage the student, but if it tells you like you're stupid or something and it's wrong, you're not going to want to speak any more." Ed remarked, "They [thumbs up and head shakes] motivate me."

Application of Students' Perceptions of Instructional Techniques that Promote Language Learning

This section details the outcomes of this study, reflections from the researcher's teaching experience and expert writings to explore how student perceptions could be applied to improve instruction in foreign language classrooms. The outcomes are: Students are motivated to learn foreign languages through the inclusion of a variety of ancillary activities, Students learn foreign languages best when provided with activities where interaction with the second language occurs, Students learn foreign languages best when there is structure provided in their learning experiences, Students learn foreign languages best when taught within a meaningful context, Students learn foreign languages best in classrooms where personal relationships are developed and Students learn foreign languages best in environments where they feel comfortable.

Application of Students' Perception that Learning Is Prompted By The Inclusion of Ancillary Activities

The outcomes of the study indicate that the students prefer to learn second languages in a class where a variety of ancillary activities were offered. Students appreciated the inclusion of activities that were organized outside of the work from their textbooks. This new "eclectic approach" to language learning is one that many teachers today are adopting (Galloway and Labarca, 1990). Gone is the era of searching for the "one true way" approach such as was evidenced in the time of the Audio-Lingual and Grammar Translation approaches (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). Students preferred learning situations where their teachers employed a variety of methods in encouraging them to learn new languages. In fact, Gardner (1999) suggests that in order to address the development of a variety of multiple intelligences, individually configured educations are imperative. Moreover, he recommends that "education takes individual differences seriously...and crafts practices that serve different kinds of minds equally well" (p. 151). Thus, the inclusion of a variety of activities better allows the teacher to reach the

preferred learning modality of each student. As summarized by Galloway and Labarca (1990), "No one method will reach the modality preferences and priorities of all learners." What is needed in today's classroom is not a teaching method, but rather, "a teaching repertoire" (p. 115).

The language learners felt they benefited, especially in their early years of language learning, from their teachers' inclusion of a variety of activities that allowed them to immediately apply their newly learned language skills. They commented that their need for ancillary activities to serve as a means of motivation and application diminished as their language studies increased. By the latter stages of language learning, at least at the secondary school level, students have previously held knowledge upon which they could recall in order to learn new concepts. They were no longer as dependent on their teachers to guide them through a variety of activities in an effort to create meaningful schemata. This process is reminiscent of Ausubel's subsumption theory (West, Farmer, and Wolff, 1991). This theory supports what students indicated as a diminished need for teacher-guided activities as they advanced in their language studies. Ausubel's subsumption theory states that as students have experienced meaningful learning, "the person organizes or subsumes, the new knowledge into old knowledge" (West, Farmer, and Wolff, 1991). The students' perception that ancillary activities be included in foreign language instruction and related support from expert literature provide two recommendations for classroom instruction. Foreign Language teachers should incorporate a variety of ancillary activities to allow their students to learn through their preferred modalities and as a means of giving students the opportunity to build meaningful language learning experiences. As suggested by the Indiana Professional Standards Board Content Standards for Teachers of Foreign Languages (1999), today's language teacher should select from the range of teaching approaches that are known to be successful in meeting the diverse needs of learners.

Application of Students' Perception That Foreign Languages Are Best Learned Through Interactive Activities

The outcomes of the study also indicated that the students learned foreign languages best when provided with activities where interaction occurred with the new language. The students learned from a variety of interaction; speaking, singing, writing, role-playing, competing, reading, constructing projects and repeating limericks, among others. Sizer (1992) supports the idea of abandoning "the most used pedagogy" in high schools, "telling" (p. 85). He reinforces the students' perception that "we learn well only when we are engaged" (p. 85)

The students not only learned best when their teachers used instructional techniques that promoted interaction with new languages, but felt that opportunities to apply their newly learned knowledge in scenarios where they created original dialogues, conversations and writings had enhanced their language learning. This process, construction of knowledge, is an important component of authentic instruction as defined by Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage (1995). Moreover, the students felt they best learned to speak second languages by being given situations where they could communicate. Other sources support the practice of learning to communicate by practicing the skills of communication (Savignon, 1983). The Indiana Professional Standards Board Content Standards for Teachers of Foreign Languages (1999) also suggest that not only the teacher, but the learners, should use the target language extensively for communicating in the foreign language classroom. Once again, this favored instructional practice of providing learners with opportunities to communicate through a deep understanding of a subject matter is another hallmark of authentic instruction (Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage, 1995). Specifically, using a deep understanding of knowledge related to language learning and relying on that knowledge to engage in "elaborated communication" is also an aspect of "disciplined inquiry," another component of authentic instruction (Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage, 1995). Gardner (1999) also

suggests that learners communicate through a deep understanding of their new knowledge. He advocates an emphasis on performances, which allow students to immediately apply new knowledge and demonstrate insights into their learning. As summarized by Lee and VanPatten (1995), with the advent and popularity of communicative language teaching, the instructor's role has changed. The foreign language teacher should no longer be the drill sergeant, but should be responsible for providing students with ample opportunities for communication, that is, "using the new language to interpret and express real life messages" (p. 8).

Another outcome of this study indicated that students learned best in environments where structure was provided in their learning experiences. The students did not suggest rote-recall, "drill and kill" activities of years past. But indicated that they learned best in classrooms where they knew what behaviors and outcomes were expected of them as learners. A predictable, orderly classroom environment where students are aware of the expectations made of them as learners is documented in the literature. For example, Wong (1991) writes that a well-managed classroom is one that has a "predictable environment" (p. 88). He elaborates be saying that students will actually make better achievement gains in a class that has a "predictable environment" (p. 88).

The students said they benefited from having the teacher not only assign them to be a part of a particular group, thus providing the class with structure, but also profited from the teacher's sharing the guidelines for accomplishing group tasks. Sizer (1992) supports the idea of having "a clear academic destination" (p. 90). He concludes that having a destination, what a student has to demonstrate in order to have success, provides incentive for the student to learn. (Sizer, 1992).

Another type of structure that the students said benefited their second language learning was the provision of structure in activities that specifically focused on the development of speaking the target language. Learners said when their teachers had provided a foundation for pronunciation, they continued to rely on this foundation as their

language study progressed. The students also profited from their teacher establishing a pre-determined system for grading their participation in oral classroom activities. The students commented that if they tried to speak new languages, they would learn new languages. Omaggio-Hadley (1993) suggests that the affective value of oral proficiency activities should be considered in language instruction. She comments that "some students are most comfortable with structured learning environments because of either personality variables or cognitive style preferences" (p. 239). She recommends that teachers know their students. "Formal practice activities may be most suitable for students who have a low tolerance for ambiguity or who are reluctant to take risks, especially when they are just beginning language study" (p. 239). The outcomes suggest that a predictable environment is one where language learning can flourish. Students benefit from and enjoy knowing what behaviors and outcomes are expected of them as language learners. The necessity for structure in language learning is also echoed by The Indiana Professional Standards Board Content Standards for Teachers of Foreign Languages (1999) which recommend that foreign language teachers exhibit the ability to create long and short-term plans which are responsive to their learners' needs. In addition, the students commented that they profit from a teacher-organized system of assessing oral participation in their language classes. As summarized by Jon, "If you participate, you're going to learn anyway."

Application of Students' Perception that Foreign Languages Are Best Taught Within A Meaningful Context

The students' preference for learning new language within a meaningful context was another outcome of the study. The notion of context was interwoven throughout several of the study's outcomes. The students perceived the provision of a meaningful context to be an important backdrop to the introduction or practice of target language materials.

The students spoke of learning classroom routines most easily by practicing these phases within the context of normal, daily interactions and negotiations. They also learned vocabulary most easily when the teacher worked to provide the new words within a given context, without the aid of oral translation. In addition, the students preferred to learn listening skills by having their own teachers and videotapes as models. The idea of providing context as an important aspect of learning is documented in both educational and foreign language teaching literature. Omaggio-Hadley (1993) suggests that "videotaped materials can be especially useful at the lower ranges of proficiency because of the visual contextual support they provide" (p. 170).

Authentic achievement, an important component of authentic instruction, applies to this outcome. Students learn best when foreign languages are taught within a meaningful context, a context that helps them understand how their new knowledge can "have a value beyond the demonstration of competence in school." (Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage, 1995). The application of this outcome for current and future teachers of foreign languages is an important component of the Indiana Professional Standards Board Content Standards for Teachers of Foreign Languages (1999). These standards recommend that teachers provide opportunities to communicate in the second language in meaningful activities that simulate real life scenarios. As summarized by Omaggio-Hadley (1993) who writes, "Students need to learn languages in logical contexts, either through authentic discourse or through language learning materials that stimulate authentic input..." (p. 152).

Application of Students' Perception that Foreign Languages Are Most Easily Learned In Classrooms Where Personal Relationships Are Developed

The idea that students learn new languages best in an environment where personal relationships are developed was another outcome of this study. The students felt they profited from having the opportunity to develop personal, trustful, working relationships

with their teachers and peers. Students felt more comfortable learning second languages when they had developed friendships with their classmates. The creation of a "community of learners" (Fullan, 1993, p. 45) and its positive effects upon students' learning has been documented in the writings of several theorists. In the foreign language field, Savignon (1983) comments that, "Communicative language teaching requires a sense of community" (p. 122). She adds that teachers need to work to create an environment of trust where "learners may interact without fear of failure" (p. 122). The students said they were more comfortable working in groups when they had been given opportunities to develop friendships that were based on trust. Fullan (1993) writes, "The development of a sense of community and the habits and skills of collaboration is a central tenet of all proposals to develop schools as learning organizations"(p. 44).

The students learned best and were most motivated to engage in second language activities when they felt a personal connection to their language teachers. Students commented that having this personal connection paid off when their teachers asked them to complete difficult or less-appealing assignments. McLaughlin (1993) supports the idea of a personal connection in secondary classroom. She writes that the degree to which a secondary school is personalized for its students matters more than any other single factor in encouraging students' engagement and their willingness to work hard on academic goals. In other words, McLaughlin has found that no other factor in secondary schools contributes more to student involvement than does the personal connection between learners and their school environment. Moreover, the Indiana Professional Standards Board Content Standards for Teachers of Foreign Languages (1999) suggest that teachers show an active interest in their own language students' activities, even those activities that extend beyond interaction in the second language. The process of developing positive relationships in second language classrooms could have many potential benefits to both learners and teachers alike. Positive, trustful relationships that create a learning

community could result in significant gains in student engagement and collaboration that might eventually lead to higher levels of achievement.

Application of Students' Perceptions That Foreign Languages Are Learned Most Easily In Comfortable Environments

The outcomes of the study revealed that the students learn new languages best in environments where they feel comfortable. They emphasized the importance of their teachers establishing an environment where all facets of language learning, from pacing to student-teacher interactions were delivered in a comfortable fashion to the learners. Omaggio- Hadley (1993) states that she favors a language methodology that "addresses the affective needs of students by providing a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere"(p. 118). Students having a comfortable relationship with their teacher is also supported in educational literature. Glasser (1990) writes that students have described good teachers as "a teacher who relates to them on their level; the teacher does not place herself above them and they are comfortable talking with her" (p. 66). Therefore, the teacher must always consider the comfort level of language learners in regard to specific language-learning activities and environments. The process of learning a new language can be uncomfortable for adolescents. Language teachers should follow the advice of Glasser (1990) who suggests that, "While getting to know the students, the teacher is continually looking for a better way to teach and asking for their input on what this might be" (p. 53).

Insights into Instructional Techniques That Promote Language Learning

The outcomes revealed that students were motivated to learn a foreign language through a variety of ancillary activities that were offered by their language teachers. The development of a repertoire of ancillary activities could benefit language learners and their teachers in a variety of ways. First, language teachers need to become better aware

of the learning style preferences of their second language students and how learners' preferred modalities can shape instruction. Developing ancillary activities outside of the adopted second language textbook allows instructional practice to best meet the needs of the learners and therefore, does not allow the textbook to drive the delivery of content in the language classroom. Second, because many language teachers interact with as many as 150 students each day, new practices for developing second language activities that meet the learning style needs of all students are necessary. An emphasis on collaboration in secondary schools could allow teachers to work cooperatively in efforts to more easily create the variety of ancillary activities and materials that students desire. This practice could reduce the burden of material development on one teacher and would also more naturally provide variety than could one teacher working alone.

The outcomes also revealed that the students learn new languages most easily when given the opportunity to interact with second language materials in authentic contexts. Much reorganization and thinking need to go into creating environments where students can find context in their language learning. First, instructional time has to be organized such that students have ample opportunity to engage in authentic communicative tasks. The nature of such exercises dictates that students have more than the several minutes of engagement time that is inherent in so many secondary classroom schedules. Second, teachers need to be provided with the money and space necessary to build and store the materials that promote authentic context in a not-so-authentic concrete wall classroom. In order to provide context in teaching second languages, teachers need to have a repertoire of materials readily available at their disposal as dictated by classroom interactions. Such items as props, pictures, transparencies, maps, reading materials, music, audio and videotapes need to be available to all language teachers. These materials could serve to provide the context that second language learners need.

The outcomes of the study also revealed that instructional techniques in foreign languages are very much enhanced by the environments where instruction occurs.

Students desire structured learning experiences, in comfortable environments where personal relationships have been developed. Foreign language teachers need to develop instructional practices that allow students to understand what expectations are made in terms of their academic performance and classroom behavior. These shared expectations can be more easily accomplished by teachers developing routines to the point that students do not spend precious engagement time continually re-learning the procedures of the classroom, but instead concentrating their efforts on interacting with new materials.

Another outcome revealed that the students felt they learned best in classrooms where personal relationships had been developed among all members of the learning community. Teachers can provide for the development of personal relationships without sacrificing the delivery of content by promoting the notion of the triangle of learning. Such a metaphor suggests that teachers, students and content materials are personally connected in an effort to promote language learning. Moreover, in such an environment, teachers need to work to develop class camaraderie to the point that students feel comfortable taking risks in their use of the new language. Lastly, teachers who create a personal connection with their learners create an environment where students feel comfortable and know that their teachers care.

Summary

This chapter outlined the outcomes of the study, which emerged from the data analysis presented in chapter 4. The outcomes revealed instructional techniques that promote language learning. Six outcomes emerged; Students are motivated to learn foreign languages through the inclusion of a variety of ancillary activities, Students learn foreign languages best when provided with activities where interaction with the second language occurs, Students learn foreign languages best when there is structure provided in their learning experiences, Students learn foreign languages best within a meaningful context, Students learn foreign languages best in classrooms where personal relationships

are developed and Students learn foreign languages best in environments where they feel comfortable. The outcomes were applied to instructional practices in foreign language classrooms and were triangulated using expert literature. The students' perceptions of instructional techniques focused around the provision of a variety of activities in their language classrooms that were provided in authentic contexts, in comfortable settings. Insights into instructional practices in foreign language classrooms were grounded in the outcomes and were provided to assist current and future language teachers in employing instructional techniques that promote language learning.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study is a qualitative analysis of student perceptions that promote language learning. This study is based on interviews with advanced-level foreign language students from throughout central Indiana, the researcher's own nine years of teaching experience and expert writings in the fields of education and foreign language teaching. This chapter summarizes the study by reviewing the steps through which the study progressed, presents a discussion of the researcher's perceptions and offers recommendations for further study.

Summary

The development of the communicative approach to language learning in the early 1970's spawned a revolution in language teaching that continued to influence instruction in the United States through the 1990's. Unlike methods of decades prior, the communicative approach focused on the active development of competence in understanding and communicating meaning (Oxford, Lavine, and Crookall, 1989). The communicative classroom calls for the student to be an integral part of instruction and for the classroom to be less teacher-centered. This study put learners at the center of understanding better classroom practices, to shed light on their preferences for acquiring second languages. This study will give us insight into the challenging role of modern day foreign language teachers, the type of teacher Grittner (1974) defines as a "teacher who experiments with many techniques and obtains feedback from students to find out what works and what does not" (p. 28). The student perspective can improve our effectiveness

as teachers of second languages. Oxford (1989) suggests that by having students better understand their own learning we can "learn from our students about their perceptions of instructional effectiveness" (p. 454).

In order to best gain the perspective of students studying foreign languages, data for this study were gathered in the natural settings where students were studying foreign languages. Thirteen students were interviewed within a 70-mile radius of Indiana State University. The schools represented a variety of environments from a private, urban high school to a small town school of several hundred students. The researcher worked with individual language teachers to ensure a representative sample of students from each building. Participating students represented three different racial backgrounds, a variety of socio-economic and academic backgrounds and the experience of having studied French, German or Spanish. All of the participants were currently enrolled in at least one, advanced-level foreign language class; several of the participants were studying two or more foreign languages at the time the data were gathered.

The purpose of the study was to gather student perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. Specifically, this study used a formal interview protocol and an interview process to understand language learners' perceptions of the most effective instructional techniques they had experienced in their years of language study. This study attempted to inform current teachers of instructional techniques that students perceive to promote second language learning. Another desired outcome of the study was to inform foreign language teacher educators how to better educate prospective teachers in regard to the perspectives of their future foreign language students.

First, this study presented a review of background literature from the fields of communicative language learning, authentic instruction and learning environments. A rich description of the context where learning occurred was included in an effort to give readers information possible to allow transferability to other settings. Also included in

this study is a description of the method of data analysis that was utilized to reach emergent themes, and eventually, the interrelated outcomes. Constant comparative analysis as originally described by Glaser and Straus (1967) and further detailed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was selected to collect, codify and analyze the data. Since the perspective of language learners themselves was to serve as the basis of the study and because data would be gathered in the natural settings where language learning was occurring, a qualitative approach was best suited for this study.

Eight major themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These were: Initial language learning, Instructional games, Classroom atmosphere, Class camaraderie, Spoken language, Written language, Assessment and Cultural understanding. Ultimately, from the data analysis six outcomes emerged. Within the study, these outcomes are applied to formulating best practices for current and future teachers of foreign languages. The outcomes are triangulated using expert citations, insights from the researcher's own nine years of foreign language teaching experience and interviews from advanced-level language students.

Instructional techniques that promote language learning were perceived to be: Students are motivated to learn foreign languages through the inclusion of a variety of ancillary activities; Students learn foreign languages best when provided with activities where interaction with the second language occurs; Students learn foreign languages best when there is structure provided in their learning experiences, Students learn foreign languages best when taught within a meaningful context; Students learn foreign languages best in classrooms where personal relationships are developed and Students learn foreign languages best in environments where they feel comfortable. These outcomes are applied to formulating instructional techniques for current and future foreign language teachers.

Discussion

This study has given me an appreciation for the multitude of factors that contribute to effective instructional practices in second language classrooms. It has also renewed my faith in the necessity of educators to always be in pursuit of more education, especially feedback from learners in regard to the ways in which they process, integrate and apply their newfound knowledge.

The students spoke of their preferences for having their teachers include a variety of ancillary materials and activities in their foreign language classrooms. Frankly, I was surprised to hear the importance of this theme from the participants. My surprise came not from the fact that this promoted language learning, because teachers know that all students learn and integrate knowledge through different modalities. The surprise I experienced was that so many of the teachers they described had employed a variety of activities in their language classrooms. My astonishment is not reflective of my perception of foreign language teachers. Rather, I am amazed that so many teachers can successfully implement the variety of activities they do, given the circumstances under which many of us have taught. The spirit of foreign language teachers must be strong. It is to our profession's credit that I heard students speak of their teachers efforts to bring songs, newspapers, magazines, games, among other materials, into their classrooms. Given the lack of money and physical space, under which many teachers teach languages, the inclusion of such a variety of materials is phenomenal. My hope is that teacher educators, current and future teachers will work toward creating and maintaining environments of collaboration where we can assist beginning teachers in the development of ancillary activities that best address the variety of learning styles present in most high schools. Through such collaboration, perhaps the development of ancillary activities will not be so costly.

The students spoke of the importance of authenticity in their language instruction. I was surprised at the number of times students suggested to me that they did not want to

take what most would consider the easy way out to learning new languages. No, they did not prefer to have vocabulary translated. Yes, they would like for their teachers to provide meaningful context when they introduce new words. The student perceptions indicated to me that they are interested and dedicated to learning second languages. They appreciated the opportunity to show off their new language skills in authentic, interactive experiences in front of their language classmates. The possibilities for developing interactive and yet, authentic experiences for language learners are endless. One boundary for developing such experiences is scheduled time. Hopefully, movements to restructure high school scheduling will result in language teachers having the capability of introducing and presenting authentic activities and assessments within a day's language learning session.

The notion of the importance of comfort in learning second language arose early in the study. From initial interviews, I detected that it would be an emergent theme. Although I have always tried to see that the students in my language classroom felt at ease with both the materials, their peers and with me, I am not sure that I have ever considered this one of the most important aspects of delivering effective instruction. As I continue to teach, this will be a facet of my classroom upon which I will continually reflect. Comfort is obviously very important to language students. In terms of foreign language teacher education, encouraging a new teacher to develop comfort in his or her classroom could be a challenge. Because beginning teachers are not necessarily comfortable themselves with the process of instruction, classroom management and their own second language skills, new teachers need to be mentored through the process of setting up comfortable learning environments. Moreover, current and future language teachers need to continually connect language learning with the personal lives of the students they instruct. This type of connection will work toward creating authenticity in foreign language classrooms and toward creating environments where students know their teachers care.

This study has given me confidence in the process of qualitative research. Although the less step-by-step process was, at times, unnerving, my advisor was continually reassuring me that my analysis would result in meaningful outcomes that rigorously described student perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning. I initially color-coded meaningful segments of the students' perceptions. This coding led to deeper analysis and emergent themes. Through further analysis, the outcomes of the study emerged. Describing such themes and outcomes as separate entities was difficult. As I began to realize the very interrelated nature of the outcomes, themes, applications and expert citations, I was not only excited, but also assured that a qualitative paradigm was the best choice for studying the complexities involved in foreign language instruction.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further research related to student perceptions of instructional techniques in language learning could be used to improve learning environments. Recommendations for further study encompassing the outcomes of the study and the researcher's insights are:

1. Examine the perceptions of instructional techniques in learning environments where students study languages in a non-traditional schedule, where more time may be allotted for communicative and authentic tasks.

2. Examine the perceptions of instructional techniques and specifically, their relationship to learning styles in foreign language courses where students continue study with the same teacher over a number of academic years.

3. Examine the establishment of comfortable learning environments in teachers' classrooms in an effort to more specifically inform entry-level teachers of how to effectively ensure comfort among language learners.

4. Examine foreign language teachers' perceptions of instructional techniques that promote language learning.

5. Examine the specific reasons why foreign language students have particular perceptions of instructional techniques in foreign language learning.

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APPENDIX A

January 2, 1999

Dear Parents or Guardians of _____:

My name is Angie Ridgway and I am a doctoral student at Indiana State University and a part-time Spanish teacher at Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School I am currently working on a research project about language learning that will partially fulfill the requirements to finish a PhD in education.

Throughout my eight years of teaching Spanish, I have been interested in best understanding the ways in which my students learn a second language. This year, I have incorporated my prior curiosities into a formal proposal to study student perceptions of instructional techniques that enable them to learn new languages. I will be interviewing and collecting brief journal entries from students throughout Indiana. All students and their teachers and schools will remain anonymous and all interviewing and journal writing will be conducted at the high schools where students study second languages. The teachers and I will work together to ensure that my work with the students provides minimal interruption to their school day.

Would you kindly give permission for your son or daughter to participate in my work? I hope that through such efforts, I can eventually share information with other language teachers regarding which teaching strategies most help our students to learn.

Please feel free to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Angie Ridgway

My son/daughter, _____, has my permission to participate in interview questions with Mrs. Ridgway in order to gather data concerning language learning. I understand that the interviews will be audiotaped and that all students, teachers and schools will not be identified by name in the final copy of Mrs. Ridgway's dissertation.

_____dated: ____/___/99.